

northern
spirit
fc



"A Spirited Season"

northern
spirit
f.c.

A SPIRITED SEASON

The Official History of Northern Spirit F.C. 1998/99

by Micky Brock

In memory of my Father - Leonard Alfred Brock 1916-1999. Love You. R.I.P.

Dedication

In undertaking a project of this magnitude, sincere thanks have to go to many people and if I have inadvertently missed any from the short list below, it certainly wasn't intentional.

Tancred, John, Adrian, Julian, Evelyn, Bec, Fargo & Anne-Marie, L'il Nat, Anthony, Ari, Peter and Jenny Devlin, Mickey 'West Ham', Stan 'Robbo', 'Nobby' Beale Jnr, Chris, Ash, the 'Mendez Boyz', various supporters clubs around NSW, Joe Murphy Photography, Sports West Media, Richard Kreider, Chrissy and Julie-Anne, Victor (for the coffee) and Dawn, the legions of Spirit fans, the Clan Miller, Celtic Association of Australia, the Ireland, England, Scotland and Cornwall representative sides, Manly-Warringah Referees Association, 'Willie' and to all of those who believe in the phrase: **'For the good of the game'**.

To Remo, Manny, 'Arnie', 'Bulldog', 'Crookie', 'Mossy', 'Billy', the rest of the Northern Spirit squad and work colleagues for their help and support, and especially to my wife and children, Dianne, Liam and Saraid, for their patience, support and love.

Thank-you all.

Micky Brock

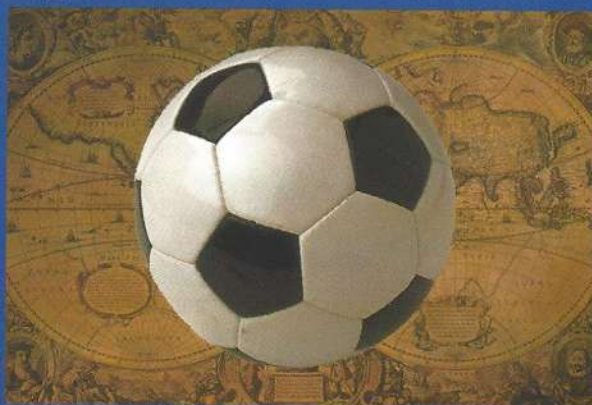
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INTRODUCTION

"It'll never take off. The other clubs have over twenty years of tradition behind them. Northern Spirit has no tradition. Where will they get the supporters from?"

So spoke a highly respected TV/Print media personality and football pundit but, as things were to turn out, boy did he get it wrong. Big time!

Indeed, it was to be seen that this very lack of 'tradition' was one of the major assets of this brand new concern and the traditions of the club, as such, began on day one with new and innovative ideas that would sweep the cobwebs of old away like a new broom.

An NSL club on the north shore of Sydney had been muted many times before of course, but until the start of the 1998/99 season, it had never eventuated in what remains one of the lesser noted 'hot beds' of the code in Australia. An area that had been starved of top flight football since the inception of the NSL way back in 1977. Quite why this is the case is anyone's business of course, but the untapped market it would help to provide proved the critics wrong.

Many obstacles were placed in the way of those who had tried to establish themselves prior to Northern Spirit being given the go-ahead by Soccer Australia in early 1998, and none more so than Remo Nogarotto (Chairman) and Emmanuel Zammit (Vice-Chairman) pursued the dream with such a passion that it became a reality.

A two-part plan was devised and implemented that saw the three local northern suburb associations - Ku-ring-gai, Manly-Warringah and Gladesville-Hornsby - accepting that this was a viable proposition and would stand the test of time. This was accomplished and phase two was set in motion.

Northern Spirit, as the club was to be called, needed to attract the calibre of player that would show the traditional Ericsson Cup clubs that they meant business. To this extent, Graham Arnold was the first on board and became the player/coach of the new NSL club, and in Australian football terms, they don't come much bigger than 'Arnie'.

With Arnold on board it gave credence to that which Nogarotto and Co. were selling - a way forward for football in Australia, with the chairman adding: *"No longer can we accept football being described as a sleeping giant. The giant has awoken!"*. It was this aggressive approach, coupled to the signature of Arnold, that heralded the arrival of many of Australia's finest.

Kresimir Marusic, Luke Casserly, Paul Bilokapic all came aboard the good ship Spirit, and were joined by some that were to become household names before the season was out: Paul Henderson, Matthew Langdon, Daniel Watkins, Michael Cunico, Eddie Bosnar. Allied to these signings were ex-England international Ian Crook, former Socceroo Robbie Slater and before too long, current Socceroos in Robbie Enes and Matt Bingley, to name a few.

The playing staff was slowly taking shape and it became imperative that a Board of Directors, all remarkable in their field, was assembled to promote the fledgling club and to keep it in the public spot-light. Kerry Chikarovski, Peter Rix, Rene Licata, Allan Novis and Kathryn Greiner accepted positions and everything looked rosy in the garden.

Then came the Asian market collapse, from where the majority of finance for the club was coming, and 'jeopardy' became the new buzzword. It was at this time that Remo Nogarotto and Co. needed to find new backers, and fast!

The journey took them to England and to Mark Goldberg, Chairman and owner of Crystal Palace, in particular. So impressed was Goldberg at the way Nogarotto and Zammit conducted themselves in business, he immediately purchased a 70% stake. Indeed, it was the major shareholder of Northern Spirit that installed both Nogarotto and Zammit to their respective positions.

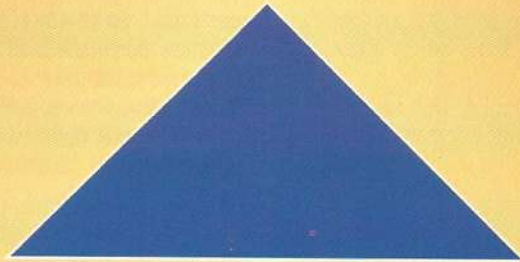
Between January and October 1998, not only had a club been built from scratch, it was to be a team that would play free flowing football, would utilise the prevailing market forces to their advantage, actively search out their new supporter base with vigour and (shock, horror), would be totally professional from top to bottom. The very thought of which only months earlier would bring howls of derision and laughter.

How soon that laughter and derision died.

Everything was now in place. The stall had been laid out and now it was time to see who would come and buy from it. Was it to be the local north shore populous or would the whole of Sydney and beyond embrace the club that was to be there for all?

Let battle commence.

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REMO NOGAROTTO

CHAIRMAN AND VISIONARY

Remo Nogarotto nurtured thoughts of Australian football being as big as its counterparts, percentage wise, in other countries around the world, the Number One sport, and although he wouldn't be able to change the entire system within the code, along with sidekick Emmanuel Zammit, together they could play a major part in its overall change, given the chance and a bucketful lot of luck.

The belief they held in the whole of Sydney and its surrounds embracing a football club irrespective of background, ethnic origin or colour was like a minor ache. It wasn't a great cause for concern but kept nagging away until something was done about it. That something was the inception and creation of Northern Spirit Football Club. The intention was made clear from the start by deleting the word '*soccer*' from the name that most teams used to differentiate their football from other codes because it hadn't reached the summit it should have in over 20-years of the National *Soccer* League. Spirit were prepared to tackle these other codes head on.

Whatever internal machinations had taken place within the league, Perth Glory had shown a glimmer of the future with crowds prepared to turn up in ever increasing numbers in the west, but lacking in support from other Ericsson Cup clubs, perhaps it was now the time to strike on the east coast.

And strike they did, but as Nogarotto would point out: *"The conventional wisdom within the football industry, and the dinosaurs that comprise the football industry, believed that the only reason Perth Glory were a success is because they were a 'one team town', and the more I looked at them the more I was convinced that it wasn't just this element, the only issue that made them work."*

IN HIS OWN WORDS

"I looked at the fact that Rupert Murdoch, in the Super League, had invested somewhere in the region of \$5-10 million in establishing the Western Reds outfit over in Perth, and with all of his money they couldn't make the 'one team town' concept work for rugby league, so why did it work for Perth Glory and not Murdoch? After all, while Nick Tana is a man of not inconsiderable wealth, I don't think even he would compare himself to dear old Rupert.

I had a long hard look at Perth and realised that it wasn't all about money but ideas firstly. Secondly it was about transplanting a good idea into a market where it would catch. This we did and it proved without a shadow of a doubt that this game, the latent level of demand for football in this country is massive. If it was going to be big in Perth, how big could it be if packaged and presented properly here in Sydney. And so the Northern Spirit and I personally, and I'm on public record as saying this many times, owe a huge debt of gratitude to Perth Glory because they came up with the template.

The great irony, probably one of the biggest untold stories of the last 12 months is that, notwithstanding the fact that ourselves and Perth Glory have emerged as kindred souls, Nick Tana and Perth Glory argued against our inclusion into the league. That is not commonly known.

Nick and I had a chat at Parramatta Stadium the year before our entry and I asked him why he was opposed to us entering into the competition, and to demonstrate how cynical he had become towards the current trends of the time, he naturally presumed that this consortium called '*Northern Spirit*' was going to be like all the other bad apples in the barrel. He had a pre-conceived view that we were going to be another '*traditional club*' and he wasn't convinced that the health of the game was good enough to warrant the entry of another

club into the system that, he thought, was going to be just another repeat of all the other clubs on the eastern seaboard. I think that in fairness to Nick, after we sat down and outlined just what it was we were going to do, he went from being an opponent to an enthusiast. Perth Glory were the benchmark and we had some sights to set on.

Two things spurred us on. Firstly, prior to the Glory, no-one had ever got it right, so it wasn't like we were entering into a market place where all these businesses, all these clubs were subscribing to the world's best practice of football administration. I knew that the product was sound. I knew the demand for the product would be good and no-one had quite got it right, so I thought with a bit of flair and imagination, if we put the right product together, we just might do it.

The second point is that the most disingenuous argument you will hear from the '*traditional*' clubs is that they are '*mainstream*'. The thing that irks me, even with some of the journalists in this country, is that the time has arrived when they have to make up their minds. Either you are a '*mainstream*' club or you're not. There is no use protesting that you are when everything that you do demonstrates that you are not, from little things like the name of the club to who can become a member of it, from the ethnic composition of the supporter base to the marketing, which is heavily skewed perhaps into one ethnic favour. It's all well and good for people to stand up and say that we accept everyone from all walks of life when you and I know, as do all those who have travelled the circles of football life in Australia know, that is not the case. There are clubs where 90% of their marketing strategy is geared towards one ethnic group. I heard David Hill say once that these people maintain that this is a multi-cultural society and they are multi-cultural when in fact these clubs are not multi-cultural at all, they are not, never have been.

There is certainly at least one journalist in NSW, and even some within the governing body, who believe in the evolutionary model and that you should allow the '*traditional*' clubs, in deference almost to the contribution they have made to this game, to stay and be allowed to change slowly. We do not have the time. They either change or they don't change and, in reality, how many of them are fair dinkum about changing?

In the build up to our first game at North Sydney Oval, I have to say it was a great thrill to see so many people here, from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds. It rates as one of the most satisfying nights of my life I think. You can plough all the work in months in advance, you can get all your planning right, all your strategies right, go out and do all your advertising, talk to people in the street and start to get a good feeling, but it isn't until the doors open and the curtain goes up that you find out how many people will fill the theatre. I was reasonably confident that we would get 10,000 spectators, and if we really got it right with our planning, all our preparatory work, we could possibly get 15,000. To have got close to 20,000 on the night was extraordinary. It was a sea of colour and to my mind, I think demolished once and for all the argument that soccer, as some would call it, couldn't be marketed in this town. We demolished the argument and importantly on that night, the detractors still came out of the woodwork and said it was a '*one-hit wonder*' and we wouldn't get them back. We then lost a couple of games on the trot and then managed to cobble together, the best you can say really, a win against Carlton in our third match and out came the detractors again, the experts who have been holding this game back for the last 20 years, and this time said that once we had lost a couple of games, the mob wouldn't be back. Well, we didn't get off to the most auspicious of starts maybe, but our supporters **DID** come back!

The first night was sensational because it demonstrated that this game can generate the electricity of a big event, of a main event, and we kept it up for the rest of the year. I have to admit at this point that I watched the first *'State of Origin'* (rugby league) game at home on TV and the crowd was something like 30,000 or so at Lang Park in Brisbane, but there was this huge electricity and noise reverberating around the ground and it suddenly dawned on me that that is exactly what our fans did at home matches ALL year, week-in, week-out. We made a *'main event'* happen in this town every other week, every second Friday night. That is extraordinary. Most people say to you that you can have one or two major events, but to actually keep that up, to generate that atmosphere every fortnight, is quite unprecedented in Sydney. No rugby league club has ever been able to do it, I'm talking about a sustained atmosphere throughout a season and not just through a finals series. It is contestable whether the Sydney Kings were able to pull it off a couple of years ago, a much smaller indoor venue of course, but it had never been done week-in, week-out before in this town. The Sydney Swans have done so to a certain extent, but I would argue that no-one has brought them as close to the market as we have.

Another encouraging aspect was that our fans showed they were prepared to travel, something almost unheard of. At Belmore against Sydney Olympic, certainly at Marconi for both the last game of the season and the second-leg finals match, at Sydney United, Brisbane, Wollongong, Newcastle, Canberra and even down to Gippsland when we played the Falcons, there were always Spirit supporters on the move. One of the great traditions in football, as many will know, is the trip from London to Manchester or to Turin from Milan. This is all a part of supporting a side and it's these traditions that our fans are starting to build here. We're building them very quickly and I cannot take any real credit for that because one thing that has blown me away is the level of emotional attachment we have developed from our supporter base for the club so quickly. It's almost as if we have been around for fifty years or so, and I put that down to one simple thing and that is simply that the fans out there have been craving for a football team to attach this emotion to. These supporters, both the home support and those who travel away to watch the side, are the aficionados who love their football and who have been denied the pleasure of allowing this emotion to be vented towards a football club of their own. I'd completely underestimated how strong that would be, the emotional support I'm talking about here, not the numbers. It's simply fantastic.

I would describe this first season as *'a roller-coaster ride without the safety belt'*. An exhilarating experience but sometimes you didn't know whether you were going to stay planted in the seat or not. Neither Manny (Zammit) nor I had long to put this club together, the player recruitment, the mechanics etc. Some were put together with a bit of haste, and if we had the time again we'd probably do some things a little differently. On the marketing, promotional, entertainment side of things, I don't think we'd go back and do anything differently at all. The formula has proven to be successful so what could we change? Next year we will find ourselves in this wonderful position that most

businesses would like to be in. We've discovered the formula that our supporters want and what we have to do in the year ahead is the maintenance and fine-tuning. We don't have to go out and re-write the formula, we know it works. It just needs some fine-tuning, whereas most clubs have to go back to the drawing board at the end of a long campaign.

If I had to go back and do it all again, I would. In football terms, this has been the most satisfying year of my life. We've spent a lot of money, everyone knows that, but given the prominence this club now holds in the market place, that is a very small amount compared to that which other codes have spent. One board member of an AFL club thought we must have invested a minimum five times the amount that we actually did to put this club on the map. He nearly had a coronary when he found out just what the figure was. The prominence we have gained, the brand awareness we have achieved, other codes believe would have cost them between \$10-15 million at least, and I can assure you that we didn't spend anywhere near that amount!

At the end of the day, we can put on all the rock bands, we could play in the best stadium, put out the best football team on the pitch, but if you haven't got the heart and soul on the terraces, you haven't got a football club. Contrary to popular belief, football clubs are not made of chairman, they are not even made of footballers. You can parade the best eleven players in the country but if they haven't got an audience to play to, it's not much of a show.

This club owes everything to our fans. There will be times when we disagree with them, and they with us, that's the way of the world, but I feel that everyone around the board table of this club would say one big *'thank-you'* to you all and when you come back to us next season, we'll give you another go on the thrilling ride that is football.

And if you're lucky, we might even put the safety rail in this time.



Remo Nogarotto
Chairman - Northern Spirit Football Club

HIS MASTERS VOICE



Graham Arnold with Bernd Stange -
The two new coaches in Australian football
Photo - Richard Kreider

Graham Arnold is one of the best strikers Australia has ever produced and his playing resume is impressive to say the least. However, as a coach his credentials had never been tested and would come under close scrutiny by the media.

"In our first season, a Top Six finish is what I'm aiming for. The club hasn't even been established for 12 months yet and we must be realistic in what we can achieve in that space of time. Anything less than a Final's berth would be disappointing, even having said that. It's a challenge I'm looking forward to," said Arnold.

In the short term not too great a challenge some would say, but in reality it was a task that many clubs find difficult and is something they have never experienced for all their 'tradition'.

Arnold would, after studying throughout his career under some of the greatest names in club football, introduce European practices at Spirit Park, as would Bernd Stange, the new German coach of Perth Glory, which begged the question: *Would they work in Australia?*

The former Socceroo star was out to answer his critics where it mattered - on the pitch.

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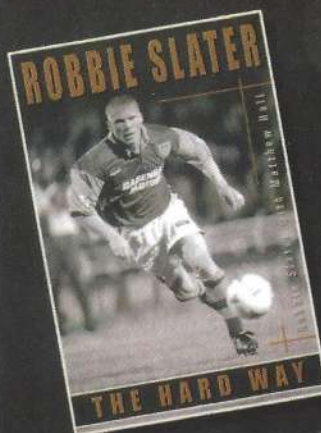
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ROUND ONE

Friday, 9th October 1998

Northern Spirit 0

Sydney Olympic 2

Kalantzis 54

Cardozo 57

Amid the hype and ballyhoo, Northern Spirit played their first competitive NSL game in front of a new crowd attendance record of nearly 19,000 fans at North Sydney Oval. Everything, it seemed, was right on the night and the nil-two defeat by the visitors was the only blemish on an otherwise perfect evening in what transpired to be a turning point not just for football in Sydney, but for the code in Australia, emphasising that the fans were out there and were more than eager to participate.

One previously unheard of event was the 'Mexican Wave' that circled the ground time after time. When it appeared sections wouldn't join in 'Spirit Point', and others, would boo loudly until they did. But what would happen when it got to the Mollie Dive stand where all the VIP guests were housed? As if joined at the hip they rose as one, arms in the air to join in the festive atmosphere, much to the delight of the assembled throng. It was to prove that this was no ordinary club with a staid board. It was different, and it meant business.

Rock bands, sky-divers and fireworks before the game paled to insignificance as an unseemly scuffle between Mark Rudan and Adem Poric (Olympic) in as early as the 15th minute, saw both players head for the dressing rooms before the match could finally settle into a rhythm. (Football being the fickle mistress she is, little did either player know what was waiting further down the track. Only time would be able to give them the answer?):

Sydney Olympic, pre-season title contenders in many eyes, turned the hostile atmosphere of 'Spirit Park' to their advantage after weathering the early onslaught of the home team. Slater, Marusic, Arnold (Player/Coach) and Co. had 'Spirit Point' jumping and the decibel level rising with some outstanding passages of play that turned Olympic's defenders into heroes as wave after wave of attacks rained down on them from all angles on an evening that will long live in the memory as the day 'real' football arrived on the North Shore.

Captain Robbie Slater had a shot cleared off the line early in the second-half after some desperate defending by Peter Tsekenis saw him diving to head clear, perhaps the turning point of the entire match. Had this effort found the back of the net, Olympic would have to alter their thinking and play catch-up football, exposing their rearguard more often and allowing the speed of Cranney and Casserly on the wings to create further openings for Zane in attack.

Two goals in quick succession for the visitors soon after saw the roles reversed, and not for the last time this season as 'catch-up football' almost became the Spirit catch phrase, as firstly Chris Kalantzis (54) and then Pablo Cardozo (57) turned the game on its head as debutante goalkeeper Paul Henderson could do nothing to prevent Olympic from going ahead and then extending their lead.

For Spirit, heads could have dropped but instead further commitment to the cause, if that were at all possible, was shown and but for some stout defending, a share of the points, or better, would have remained on the north side after the opposing woodwork was twice hit in the last 15 minutes with several further efforts blocked or whistling just past the uprights.

On a damp evening when the gates were locked with many hundreds queuing outside unable to get in, everything but the result came good with one banner summing it all up: 'Twenty years late but worth the wait'.

Robbie Slater, on the question of 'pressure' for Spirit's first match said: "Ian Crook, Arnie and I have played in a lot of places around the world where there is pressure, but even I was feeling a bit tense before our first match. It wasn't so much nerves, more like, let's get this one over with so we can get on with the rest of the season. We'll be a lot more relaxed after this one and hopefully the results will now follow."

OCTOBER 1998



MILESTONE

Paul Henderson, Michael Cunico and Ian Crook make their NSL debuts for Northern Spirit in the club's inaugural match.

A new non-final's crowd record was set when the official attendance was given at 18,985.

Coaches comment: "I'm disappointed obviously. I'm not sad for me so much as for the fans, players and officials. It was a great night for Australian football - a real positive for the code and I just hope it doesn't stop the supporters from coming back here for our next home match."

Spirit: Henderson, Bosnar, Crook, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold (Cunico 74), Cranney, Bilokapic (Watkins 67), Zane. Sub not used: Purdue.

Olympic: Kourtis, Ciantar, Tsekenis, Taliadoros, Brennan, Poric, Thomas (Culina 89), Kalantzis, Emerton (N.Carle 80), Tome (Juric 72), Cardozo.

Y/C: Olympic - Kourtis, Kalantzis, Cardozo

R/C: Spirit - Rudan Olympic - Poric

Ref: Simon Micallef

Att: 18,985 - New NSL Regular Season Record

Pos: n/a

ROUND TWO

Sunday, 18th October 1998

Perth Glory 2

Strudwick 57

Markovski 78

Northern Spirit 0

In a match that highlighted the skilful art of the goalkeeper, at both ends of the pitch, newcomers Northern Spirit slumped to their second straight loss and another two dismissals for the visiting team made it three red cards in just two NSL games to mar what was an extraordinary match.

The first-half saw a keenly contested affair with each defence standing rock solid and showing few signs of being breached. When they were, the 'keeping of Henderson and Milosevic (Perth Glory) was outstanding. John Markovski was put through on Spirit's goal in the twelfth minute but his shot went wide of the upright and with a further six minutes on the clock an Ian Crook free-kick for Spirit from just outside the box was well saved by Milosevic. With injuries mounting for the Sydney side, Crook was soon to leave the field after a fair challenge by Bobby Despotovski saw him sustain a knee injury that would keep him out of the next nine matches.

Paul Henderson repaid the faith Arnold had shown in him in the 22nd minute when he majestically palmed a John Markovski shot onto the crossbar and then brilliantly saved a penalty from the same player seven minutes later after Michael Cunico was adjudged to have bundled over Gavin Wilkinson inside the box.

Glory were on the attack again early in the second period and with fifty one minutes gone Despotovski had a shot cleared off the line by Luke Casserly, but now it looked as though the tide was starting to turn in what had been an even contest up to this point.

Henderson was again called into action in the 57th minute when he could only parry a clever free-kick by Despotovski. Paul Strudwick was on hand to gleefully head home the rebound and Spirit were once again in the position of playing 'catch-up' football.

The struggle was made even harder in the biting heat of the West Australian capital when Casserly was shown a second yellow card of the match and was soon joined in the dressing rooms by Paul Bilokapic in the 78th minute, for a crude tackle from behind on Vinko Buljubasic.

In between the two red cards came a second goal for Glory. Gareth Naven was unable to reach a bye-line cross from Scott Miller but Markovski was there to tuck the ball away, through the legs of Henderson, and atone for the earlier penalty miss.

Any hope Spirit had of a revival and a share of the points disappeared with the two sending's off but there were some encouraging signs to be seen in the teamwork and passing of the NSL's newest club.

OCTOBER 1998

MILESTONE

Troy Cranney celebrated his 200th NSL appearance, mainly for Brisbane Strikers, in this game, and Robbie Enes makes his debut for the club after being signed until Christmas, when the situation would be reviewed by both the club and the player. He puts in a strong performance against Perth.

Also making their debut's - Phil Moss (substitute for Enes after 83 mins) and Nick Purdue (subbed after 69 minutes by Danny Watkins).

Ian Crook receives a crippling knee injury that makes him think about hanging up his boots.

Coaches comment: "We do have some teething troubles, as any new club would have, but I'm now also facing the prospect of losing players. I've already got Perinich and Ollerenshaw out injured for the season, and now Ian Crook is out with a medial ligament problem to his left knee which is likely to keep him on the sidelines for some time. Add to that the red cards of Luke Casserly and Paul Bilokapic today, and the one to Mark Rudan the week before, and you can see we're not giving ourselves much of a chance to settle in as a team. Michael Cunico and Paul Henderson can both hold their heads high after playing exceptionally well today."



'Hendo' saves Majestically at full stretch from Bobby Despotovski

Photo by Richard Kreider

Glory: Milosevic, Trajkovski, Miller, Buljubasic, Wilkinson, Hay, Naven (Boutsianis 83), Strudwick (Garcia 79), Markovski, Despotovski, Halpin (Kalogeracos 63).

Spirit: Henderson, Crook (Bosnar 31), Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Cranney, Bilokapic, Zane, Purdue (Watkins 69), Cunico, Enes (Moss 83).

Y/C: Glory - Halpin
Spirit - Henderson, Casserly, Slater

R/C: Spirit - Casserly, Bilokapic

Ref: Eugene Brazzale

Att: 17,580

Pos: 15th

THE INJURIES MOUNT UP

Star imported sweeper Ian Crook left Perth Oval after only 30 minutes of his second NSL match with knee ligament damage that will probably see him out of the side for up to six weeks.

Graham Arnold also suffered a neck injury but due to suspensions and a mounting casualty list, he has no option but to play on for the team and to lead by example on the pitch.

In a first for the Spirit player-coach, he decides to move from his usual position of striker to a more defensive midfield role. The reality is that 'Arnie' is suffering from a nasty neck problem which prevents him from heading the ball as much as is possible. The move doesn't quite transpire as he actually moves further back into the pack and goes on to become a revelation as a 'sweeper' and turns in some classy performances that belie his maturing years.

On another bright note, Gabriel 'Chi Chi' Mendez resumes training after recovering from the third knee operation of his career.

PHIL MOSS PLAYER AND YOUTH DEVELOPMENT OFFICER



The phenomenon that is Northern Spirit didn't just 'happen'. It was, and remains, something the club has had to work hard for, and probably none more so than our No.13 - Phil Moss.

As he is affectionately known, 'Mossy' is not just a player, but the Youth Development Officer and as such works tirelessly behind the scenes organising school visits by the players as well as training with the first-team squad amongst an ever increasing work load that shows little sign of abating.

It is quite apparent that here is a lad who gains much enjoyment from his 'other duties' and over 300 appearances at schools, fetes and coaching clinics would attest to.

Says 'Mossy': "As a kid I knew myself that I used to love visits from star sportsman and I think the day that you forget your roots is the day you should give it away. As the only local northern beaches player in the first grade squad, I feel it is my duty to ensure the kids in our area know the players and the club that they have been starved of for so long. It's a great thrill for me to not only run out on to North Sydney Oval in front of 16-17,000 screaming supporters, but also to put a smile on a youngsters face and see the enthusiasm in their eyes."

When 'Mossy' was approached to become a part of the Spirit organisation, not in his wildest dreams did he think it would lead to playing so often for the side: "I never thought I would get as much game time in my first season and a lot of people thought I was here just to visit the schools, but it was always my intention to be a full-time player who spent his spare time spreading the gospel. The hard part is now ahead of me in backing up for the second season, which is always more of a challenge than the first," he said.

When asked to sum up his reaction to this topsy-turvy inaugural campaign he added: "If ever the cliché 'dreams can come true' was worthwhile mentioning, it is in my case as I've enjoyed this first season more than any in my 23-years of football. The supporters are up there with the best in the world."

To use yet another adage, 'A rolling stone gathers no Moss', and in this instance, the Moss we are talking about is the one that's doing the rolling, all the way to the top.

ROUND THREE

Sunday, 25th October 1998

Carlton 1
Bresciano 10
Northern Spirit 2
Rudan 16.90

With eight key players missing for the game - Marusic, Crook, Casserly, Bilokapic, Perinich, Perosh, Ollerenshaw and Mendez - not many pundits gave Spirit any hope of a win against the current table toppers Carlton, but as things were to pan out, the win-less drought was brought to an end, Northern Spirit finally nailing their first three points of the season with a fighting performance at Optus Oval against the previous years beaten Grand Finalists.

Before the game, Mark Rudan turned to coach Graham Arnold and said, of his sending off in Spirit's opening match: *"This ones for you. I'll give it all I've got."*

How prophetic those words would be.

Rudan turned from villain, in the opening round against Olympic, to hero when netting both goals for the visiting Spirit as the Sydneysiders turned the corner, although he was also involved in the sending off of Joe Tricarico, the Carlton striker, in as early as the 14th minute which many argue as being the turning point of the game.

Carlton coach, former Soccerroo great Eddie Krncevic, was incensed by the tackle on Rudan by his young star and stated after the match: *"He let his team mates down. It was a stupid thing to do and he's cost the boy's their match bonus. He will be heavily fined for his actions."*

By the time of his sending off, Carlton were already one goal to the good when Marco Bresciano was on the end of a Lapsansky corner in the tenth minute to add the finishing touch, but Spirit were to draw level two minutes after the departure of Tricarico when Rudan managed to fire home during a goal mouth melee.

The home side had two further chances to take the lead in the first-half but for a brilliant one-handed save by 'keeper Henderson, who was already beginning to earn the plaudits of the fans and press alike, from another Bresciano attempt, and a Lapsansky shot that hit the crossbar from a free-kick from an acute angle when there appeared no direct danger.

Clayton Zane had a couple of chances in the second period, the first falling after 51 minutes. Livewire Robbie Slater, who gave the Blues defence a torrid time throughout the match, supplied one of many perfect crosses into the box only for Zane to see his header rebound back off the post, and then have a shot saved by the outstretched hand of 'keeper Dean Anastasiadis after again being played through by the Spirit captain.

For a long while a drawn match looked the likely outcome until Mark Rudan rose majestically inside the box to head home a pinpoint cross from the rampaging Robbie Slater deep into stoppage time.

Eddie Krncevic wasn't at his most gracious after the game when reporting to the gathered media that: *"I'd rather get beaten 3-nil than to lose like that, especially after the team worked so hard for over 70 minutes. Spirit were very, very lucky. I told the players at the break that we could win this game - even with only ten men."*

"To be honest, I don't think Northern Spirit are much chop."

The beaten coach may not have been all that happy with the performance or result, but Northern Spirit were on their way and the three points would help to settle the nerves of the players.

OCTOBER 1998



Crooky, Bulldog, Crunsher, Bingers, Kresh enjoying a coffee at a cafe Beaut

MILESTONE

Mark Rudan makes history when netting the first ever Northern Spirit goal in the NSL, and celebrates by scoring the second for good measure.

James Stubbs-Mills and Paul Wearne are another duo to make their NSL debut as coach Graham Arnold proves he is unafraid to give youth and talent its chance in the big time.

Coaches comment: *"Carlton are a hell of a team, but for once a red card went our way. We've copped them for the last two games and they've broken us in half. We need to use this win as a springboard now because winning can become a habit, but one result won't have us thinking that it's all plain sailing from here. We've been crippled by injury and suspensions and so I took a lot of kids down there and they worked from start to finish. We've been under a bit of pressure and to win like that was fantastic and is a perfect way to thank the fans for sticking with us through this difficult time. We can look forward to next week now, we've arrived."*

Carlton: Anastasiadis, Atkinson, Colosimo, Douglas, Stergiopoulos, Vlahos (Pino 90), Marth, Lapsansky, Bresciano, Moriera (Josifovski 69), Tricarico. Sub not used: Cervinski.

Spirit: Henderson, Bosnar, Rudan, Slater, Arnold, Cranney, Zane, Watkins (Stubbs-Mills 78), Cunico, Enes, Moss (Wearne 88). Sub not used: Purdue

Y/C: Carlton - Atkinson, Lapsansky
Spirit - Rudan, Slater, Arnold, Cranney, Enes

R/C: Carlton - Tricarico

Ref: Brett Hugo

Att: 4,209

Pos: 13th

ROUND FOUR

Friday, 30th October 1998

Northern Spirit 2

Marusic 26

Watkins 83

Melbourne Knights 1

Karl 75

Back at North Sydney Oval after their first win, Northern Spirit were overwhelming favourites for the visit of Melbourne Knights, especially as the interstate side were to be without seven of their first team regulars, including the inspirational Zeljko Susa.

Before another huge North Sydney crowd, over 13,000, it once again looked as though Spirit were not to get the rewards their attacking football justly deserved, but there was to be a sting in the tail of this one and the emergence of yet another 'young gun' was to be heralded as arriving in the 'big time' of NSL football.

As 'Spirit Point' roared the team towards a first home victory, Kresimir Marusic duly obliged with the opening goal, his first for Spirit, his fourth NSL club. Clayton Zane, close to turning in a 'Man of the Match'



All go at the "Bowlo"

performance, sent over a cross that came back off the crossbar. Player coach Graham Arnold laid off the perfect ball for Marusic to find the back of the net at the second attempt. It was the first goal Spirit had scored at home and didn't the crowd go wild!

As was to become the custom, the opposition 'keeper became a hero for his team at Spirit Park and when he wasn't saving acrobatically, the woodwork came to his aid. Martin John made a string of fine saves to deny a second, and probably clinching, goal and the Knights had other ideas on how this game would turn out.

Harry Karl equalised in the 79th minute for the visitors after coming on as a substitute for only his second cap at this level. Things were looking grim for Spirit as the Knights began to look more than capable of holding out for the draw, even with their depleted side and, in the end, could have stolen all three points when Alex Kiratzoglou came close to silencing the crowd with an 85th minute volley that flew just wide of the post.

Enter stage right - Danny Watkins.

Three years previously, Watkins had made an appearance in the league for Parramatta Eagles as a 15-year old, the youngest player in National League history. In this game, he came on for Arnold with barely 13 minutes of play left and became almost an instant hero to the Spirit faithful. With a little over two minutes left on the clock he picked up the ball just inside the Spirit half and embarked on a solo run so mesmerising that it left the Knights defence in tatters as he waltzed his way through before unleashing a shot that threatened to burst the back of the net. He modestly stated when asked after the match about his 'wonder goal': *"All you can do when you come on as a substitute is to work hard and that was what I tried to do. I was about 30 metres out (which in reality was just over 50 metres), when I got a lucky deflection and it just seemed to open up from there."*

The sight of Northern Spirit finding the net at home, even under the nail-biting manner in which this match finished, sent the fans home happy and wanting to come back for more.

OCTOBER 1998



Troy Cranney

MILESTONE

'Willie' makes his first appearance at Spirit Park. 'Willie' - a giant blow-up Killer Whale - becomes the unofficial mascot of 'Spirit Point' and her offspring, of differing sizes, are soon to be seen around the country adorning the terraces at various Spirit matches, none more so than at the Falcons (see report for details) and Breakers away matches later in the season. It was also after this particular match that the 'Bowling Club' became the 'in' place after matches and would become the first calling point of the supporters after home games.

Oh yeah, Spirit net their first goals at home!

Coaches comment: *"I told Les Scheinflug, the National Youth team coach, about Watkins some months ago because he said that he was looking for a striker for the young Socceroos. He is a good finisher for his age and has a very bright future indeed. Having said that, I want to nurse the lad along and not throw him to the wolves at this stage of the season or his career. There will be plenty more opportunities for him. It was good to win our second game running, but for a new club finding its feet, it's a tremendous result. We've got to start putting away the chances we are creating, and when we do, sooner or later we will give some side or other a real hiding."*

Spirit: Henderson, Bosnar, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold (Watkins 77), Cranney, Bilokapic, Zane, Cunico, Enes. Sub not used: Moss, Stubbs-Mills

Knights: John, Jolic, Vukadin, Kovacevic, Sevin, Vojtek, Pondeljask (Karl 51), Brazzano (Trupkovic 59), Kiratzoglou, Kutlesovski, Rajher. Sub not used: Nasteovski

Y/C: Knights - Jolic, Vukadin, Kovacevic, Rajher

R/C: Nil

Ref: Mark Shield

Att: 13,654

Pos: 8th



STOP ME IF YOU'VE HEARD THIS ONE BEFORE...

More bitter news for Spirit fans as Troy Cranney, one of the teams most consistent players in the opening rounds of the league, suffered a freak mishap in training when snapping his Achilles tendon. The likely scenario being that he would be out for the remainder of the season.

As 'Cranners' reported later: *"It felt like someone had hit me from behind and whacked me with a cricket bat and I heard this loud 'popping' noise."* Sadly for the recruit from across the border in Queensland, it was to prove more serious than he thought after feeling little pain from the injury at the time.

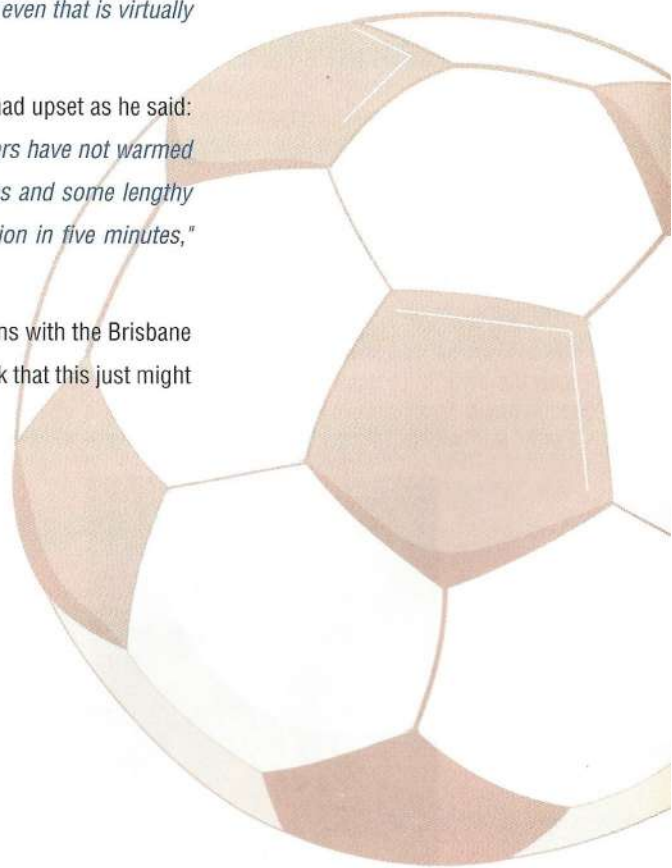
After an operation the following Tuesday, and the leg being in plaster for a further five weeks, the news was revealed that he would most likely be out for five months.

"The doctor said everything went well, especially as it was a bad rupture and for a normal person, the diagnosis was five months out. As a sportsman, it may only be four months but even that is virtually the entire season."

Graham Arnold was left wondering just who he had upset as he said: *"Injuries such as this normally occur when players have not warmed up sufficiently. We had done two long warm-ups and some lengthy runs and were about to finish the training session in five minutes,"* he concluded.

Cranney had only missed six games in six seasons with the Brisbane Strikers and everyone was now beginning to think that this just might not be Spirit's year.

northern
spirit
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ROUND FIVE

Friday, 6th November 1998

Northern Spirit 1

Slater 52

Wollongong Wolves 0

Coach Graham Arnold hoped Mark Rudan would be available for selection, which would then allow him to push Luke Casserly into a wider role out on the wing for this game.

Robbie Enes, caught square at the back by the pace of Esala Masi for the Wolves early in the match, rallied the troops after the early onslaught and stood firm when absorbing the pressure of an almost constant barrage of Wollongong attacks at the end of each period. Ultimately, the visitors lack of penetration up front was to cost them dear.

Northern Spirit recorded their third win on the trot, after losing the opening two rounds of the season, with a single goal from captain Robbie Slater, his first for the club since returning from overseas, only minutes after being taunted by a Wollongong player who inquired as to whether he should "hang up his boots" in a loud voice.

Slater later displayed great diplomacy when refusing to name just who the opposing player was.

Although Spirit played probably their worst match of the season to date, Slater's goal proved decisive and came in the 52nd minute. Northern Spirit had the added bonus of keeping a clean sheet for the first time. Slater later said: "That goal couldn't have come at a better time. It gave me the perfect answer to the guy," with his customary cheeky grin as wide as the Harbour Bridge.

Clayton Zane again set-up the winner when dribbling around three Wolves defenders before releasing a perfect pass for Kresimir Marusic who, in turn found Slater, and he made no mistake when finding the net easily.

Phil Moss was brought in to replace the injured Cranney and although essentially a defender, he nullified the threat of Wollongong play-maker, and captain, Matt Horsley. He was also to prove creative at times and even had a couple of long range shots at goal.

Paul Bilokapic was another who starred for Spirit after coming back fitter and stronger after, in his own words: "A kick up the backside," by Arnold. "I realised that if I wanted to achieve my ambition of one day playing in Europe, I had to get serious about my football."

"The coach has put me on the right track and I'm determined to stay there and make sure I don't let anyone down again this season."

The win was built more on a high work-rate over 'flair' and may not have been the style of football to which Spirit fans had become treated or accustomed to in previous matches, but it was a vital three points. 'Pretty' football has to step aside for the 'winning' kind at times.



Kresimir Marusic

NOVEMBER 1998

MILESTONE

Northern Spirit keep their first clean sheet in the NSL as Robbie Slater nets his first for the club.

Coaches comment: "Tonight's win was very important as it gives us a little breathing space from the chasing group behind. We can relax a little now, although the first-half was probably the worst we have played all season. It was disappointing from a coaches point of view, but also for our fans who have turned up in such great numbers yet again. I wasn't happy with the way we played but we stuck to our guns and showed that we can grind out a result if we have to. Paul Bilokapic was the stand-out player for us tonight and he is looking a lot sharper after losing a few kilos. It's true, I did fine him for getting sent off recently but told him he could get half the money back if he lost a certain amount of weight."

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan (Bosnar 83), Casserly, Marusic (Stubbs-Mills 88), Slater, Arnold (Watkins 75), Bilokapic, Zane, Cunico, Enes, Moss.

Wolves: Pogliacomi, Souris, Ceccoli (Huxley 84), Stanton, Sinozic, Horsley, Brooks, Surjan (Dimoski 84), Chipperfield, Salapasisdis, Masi (Petrovski 55).

Y/C: Spirit - Bilokapic, Enes

R/C: Nil

Ref: Brett Hugo

Att: 14,818

Pos: 5th

ROUND SIX

Sunday, 15th November 1998

Adelaide City 2

Mennillo 45

Kim 73

Northern Spirit 0

'All good things must come to an end' as the saying goes and the ghosts of the opening two rounds returned to haunt Spirit as they travelled to Hindmarsh Stadium to tackle Adelaide City.

Indeed, it was the home side that showed the visitors how to score after Spirit squandered a plethora of chances in the first-half as City, without their inspirational captain Alex Tobin at the heart of their defence after failing a late fitness test, welcomed back the recently retired Soccerro Milan Ivanovic to the fold.

Kresimir Marusic proved once more that he is class above most other players in this league with a performance of outstanding brilliance. Sadly, it wasn't to be enough and another lacklustre showing in front of goal was the undoing of the Sydneysiders.

In as early as the fifth minute it was a Marusic dipping drive that just cleared the crossbar. And it was Marusic again who found Arnold unmarked in the box. His effort went closer to finding the net but a marvellous diving save by 'keeper Petkovic managed to get enough on the ball to send Arnold's crisply curling shot crashing onto the bar.

More Marusic magic in the 43rd minute put Clayton Zane clean through with only Petkovic to beat but the striker, still looking for his first goal of the season, sent his shot wide of the post in yet another missed opportunity that would prove costly before the half was over.

Deep into first-half stoppage time, Dino Mennillo fired Adelaide ahead when Spirit goalkeeper Paul Henderson, doing well to reach a fiercely struck Carl Veart strike, was unable to hold onto the ball. Mennillo swooped on the rebound and after 48 minutes of the first period, City took the lead after he drilled the ball home from a tight angle.

Spirit began the second-half brightly but remained unable to convert the goal scoring opportunities they created and paid the ultimate price when Korean import Dong Ki Kim fired City further ahead in the 73rd minute with his first goal for the club. After some great build up work, Kim finished off the move most clinically from just inside the area with a rising drive.

The second goal was the final nail in the coffin of the match but Arnold believed losing the first goal in stoppage time was the one that did the main damage: *"Psychologically, the goal just before half-time really hurt us. If we had gone in at the break at 0-0, or even 1-0 up, it might have been a completely different story,"* he said.

Round Seven was to see Northern Spirit take their first bye of the season and would give some of the walking wounded time to recuperate from what was shaping up to be a long, hard season.

NOVEMBER

1998



Coaches comment: "We have got to start scoring more goals, but many are quick to point out that Zane is yet to get off the mark. His confidence is a bit down at the moment and all strikers go through patches like this, including myself at times. When things are going well, the goal seems as wide as the 18 yard box, but when your down on your luck, it looks more like a shoe box! 'Clacka' will pull out of it and I'm not about to drop him because his general play is still excellent. We have the second lowest goals-to-game ratio at the moment, five strikes in six matches, and it's something we'll be working at improving. We have the bye next weekend and there is no point in me caning the side if we don't have a fixture for a fortnight. We'll still be training but I'll concentrate on light sessions. We are controlling the midfield well in our matches but if we don't start turning our opportunities into goals, we will be in trouble later in the season."

Zebras: Petkovic, Ivanovic, Talladira, Mori, Veart, Mennillo, Costanzo, Hassell, Terminello, Kim, Yates. Sub not used: Stam, Armour, Cartwright

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Cunico (Watkins 65), Enes (Stubbs-Mills 85), Moss. Sub not used: Bosnar

Y/C: Spirit - Enes

R/C: Nil

Ref: Louis Prospero

Att: 4,726

Pos: 7th



ROUND SEVEN - BYE

Because of the situation of 15 teams in the Ericsson Cup, it created the 'bye system' whereby every team would face two separate weekends off during the course of the season.

Northern Spirit decided to hold a 'Meet the Players Day' at North Sydney Oval where they would play the youth side in the morning, giving player coach Graham Arnold the chance to run the rule over the up-and coming players, and to give Spirit's ardent band of followers the opportunity to get the elusive autographs from their favourite players and to chat with them. Afterwards, it was to be the players who would cook up the snags on the barbie.

'The best laid plans', as the saying goes.

The game was billed as an exhibition match and heralded the return of Gabriel Mendez to action, albeit for the losing Youth side. Clayton Zane found his goal-scoring touch when completing a hat-trick. Kresimir Marusic and Danny Watkins notched up a goal apiece for the senior side in a 5-1 rout with 'Chi Chi' Mendez netting a late consolation for the youngsters from the penalty spot.

Mendez's showing in the game certainly gave Arnold room for thought and had kind words for Zane also after the run-out.

"Scoring is a confidence thing and it was great to see Clayton hit the back of the net. I've been telling him to keep playing the way he has been and the goals will come. They did in this game and hopefully that will continue into Friday night when we take on the Brisbane Strikers here," he said, turning over the odd sausage for the eager fans.

The majority of players rolled up the sleeves on the completion of the game and cooked to perfection (almost, nearly, sort of) around 500 snags but the queue for 'Hendo's' autograph was equally as long as over 1000 people turned up on a beautifully sunny day north of 'the coat hanger', sparking many players to remark that they couldn't believe the amount of support out there for the new club. It was something that most of them were just not used to in Australian football.

Not all the sausages were burnt by the players, some of whom managed to avoid their turn at cooking, surprise, surprise. John McCormack and Adrian Smith, of the Supporters Committee, offered a helping hand and thoroughly deserve a mention for their efforts.



Paul Henderson - "High fiving fans"

1998



PAUL 'SAFE-HANDS' HENDERSON - STAR IN THE MAKING

Plucked from the relative obscurity of the State Leagues, 'Hendo' was signed as an apprentice by Arnold after the latter watched him playing for Sutherland Sharks, and would effectively be the number three choice behind John Perosh and Peter Blazincic.

As often happens in this game, 'Blaza' arrived later than expected from his club in China and 'JP' picked up a niggling injury to hand Henderson the goalkeepers starting spot for the first game at Spirit Park against Sydney Olympic.

It was a starting point the 22-year old was not to relinquish during the campaign after some sparkling performances. He remained as the number One 'keeper on his efforts alone and not as the media experts would once more have the public believe that 'friction in the camp' was the cause.

The quietly spoken teetotal custodian won the fans over and his 'high-fiving' of the crowd after home games became a permanent fixture that the kids, and older fans alike, looked forward to, however, this course of action never took place before permission was asked of Graham Arnold, such is the nature of the lad.

Off the pitch he is an amiable character, quiet, friendly and almost shy, always modest. It is on the pitch that 'white line fever' takes over and he becomes the athletic 'keeper the thousands adore, earning great acclaim as the season wore on.

His penalty and free-kick saves in Perth, ultimately to prove fruitless sadly, were to announce the 'new kid on the block' was ready to weather any storm in his quest to reach perfection and it surely cannot be too long before another quality Australian custodian finds his way to the bigger leagues of Europe, saddening his fans in north Sydney, but all wishing him well for the future.

That is the enigma of 'safe hands' Henderson. It's impossible to dislike the lad with the film star looks and photogenic smile.

In summing up his year he says in almost hushed tones:

'I'd have to say that my first NSL season was reasonable and that I'm happy with the way it went. I was surprised at the beginning to get a start in the first eleven because I didn't think it would come that quickly as both 'JP' and 'Blaza' had more experience than me, but I'm grateful of the opportunity that came my way.'

Although he had a reasonable season, as 'Hendo' modestly puts it, he should look back on it as a

year of highs, but he describes the lowest point and it's obvious it still hurts deeply. *"It has been a very steep learning curve for me and the biggest disappointment came in the last game at Marconi. I can only apologise to the fans for that mistake and I hope to be stronger and be able to capitalise on what I've learnt this year,"* he said.

The supporters know that without 'safe hands' Henderson performing heroics in goal for Spirit during the 98/99 season, the side wouldn't have reached the Final's series at all, without taking anything away from a very mean defence. When on the odd occasion the defence was breached, 'Hendo' was there to save the day and he readily admits that he is humbled at the adulation that has come his way this term: *"I'm always surprised at the size of crowd Spirit attracted and maintained throughout the season. Our fans are fantastic without a shadow of a doubt and they are what makes it so special at Spirit Park, especially when they're shouting for 'Arnie' or 'Kresh' or Robbie Slater and Co. The atmosphere they generate and the noise levels are unbelievable and I hope it continues next year and I look forward to seeing and hearing them all again."*

Such is the modesty of the man, he deflects all talk of the fans love of him and places it at the feet of his team mates. The fans do love 'Hendo', of that there can be no doubt.



PAUL HENDERSON

ROUND EIGHT

Friday, 27th November 1998

Northern Spirit 1

Marusic 14

Brisbane Strikers 1

Hews 66

Spirit produced a Jekyll and Hyde performance against the Strikers with the defence having to shoulder the majority of the blame for conceding a 67th minute Chay Hews goal and giving the visitors a share of the spoils in this tense match.

Spirit failed to procure the avalanche of goals the first-half had suggested they would.

In front of another massive north Sydney crowd, Spirit supporters witnessed 45-minutes of sheer brilliance and expected more of the same in the second stanza. Graham Arnold's warning to the players at the break of: "Don't drop back. It's going well," fell on deaf ears.

Although much of the after match vitriol was directed at the defence, Arnold also admitted that too many balls were given away in the middle of the park and that, in football terms, was unacceptable.

The opening goal came from the mercurial Marusic in the 15th minute in trademark fashion for the gifted Spirit play-maker.

Matt Langdon, another 18-year old making his NSL debut, won the contest for the ball and passed it on to Danny Watkins. He then found Marusic, who turned his marker and fired into the top right hand corner of the net.

The roar from 'Spirit Point' was deafening and the atmosphere inside the ground was practically thick enough to cut with a knife as the Spirit seemed to be getting their just desserts for their enterprising style of play. Football, as ever, was to prove what a fickle mistress she can be.

How this match could possibly swing so far in favour of the Strikers was beyond the comprehension of the majority there to witness it but, in reality, the visitors could easily have gone home with all the points except for some outstanding saves by the emerging crowd favourite, Paul Henderson.

'Hendo' was forced to charge off his line in the 83rd minute with the Brisbane substitute Glenn Kolpak bearing down on goal. His timely intervention probably saved Spirit from another embarrassing defeat, although four minutes earlier they should have put the result beyond doubt.

Langdon chipped the ball over the defence after 79-minutes, to be met by the head of Mark Rudan. Jubilation turned to despair as he watched his attempt come back off the base of the post and the Strikers were able to clear their lines.

Robbie Slater also had chances to wrap up the points. His first shot whistled agonisingly wide and the second struck the base of the upright.

Even the late wake-up calls from the Strikers didn't warn Spirit to the dangers of allowing players to drift into the area unmarked. Slack marking saw Jeremy Harris ghost into the box and meet a Nick Meredith corner. Luckily for the home side, his rising header sizzled over the bar, avoiding further frustration to an already roller-coaster ride of a season.

NOVEMBER 1998



Clayton Zane

MILESTONE

Matthew Langdon becomes the latest player to make his Northern Spirit and NSL debut and goes on to produce performances that suggest he is one to watch for in the future and is certainly one of the best finds of the season.

Coaches comment: "The result is obviously very disappointing and I feel at times as though I must take a walkie talkie with me when I come off the pitch so that the players can hear exactly what I'm saying to them. Mattie Langdon had an exceptional debut. The problem with the younger lads is that they can sustain play for 60 minutes but then start to make mistakes. At this level, you just can't afford to do that. Only playing regularly will drop that aspect of their game. Overall, Langdon and Henderson did well and as they are the future of the club, it looks good for the long term success of Northern Spirit. Tonight, however, we've thrown away two points."

Spirit: Henderson, Bosnar (Moss 69), Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Bilokapic, Zane, Watkins (Arnold 75), Enes, Langdon. Sub not used: Cunico

Strikers: Bolton, Gwynne, Zoricich, Laybutt, Harper, S.Cranney, Hews, Harris, Meredith, Knipe (Kolpak 63), Bell. Sub not used: North, Srhoj.

Y/C: Spirit - Marusic, Slater
Strikers - Gwynne

R/C: Nil

Ref: Gerry Connolly

Att: 15,862

Pos: 9th

DECEMBER 1998

G3 JOINS THE SPIRIT PHENOMENOM

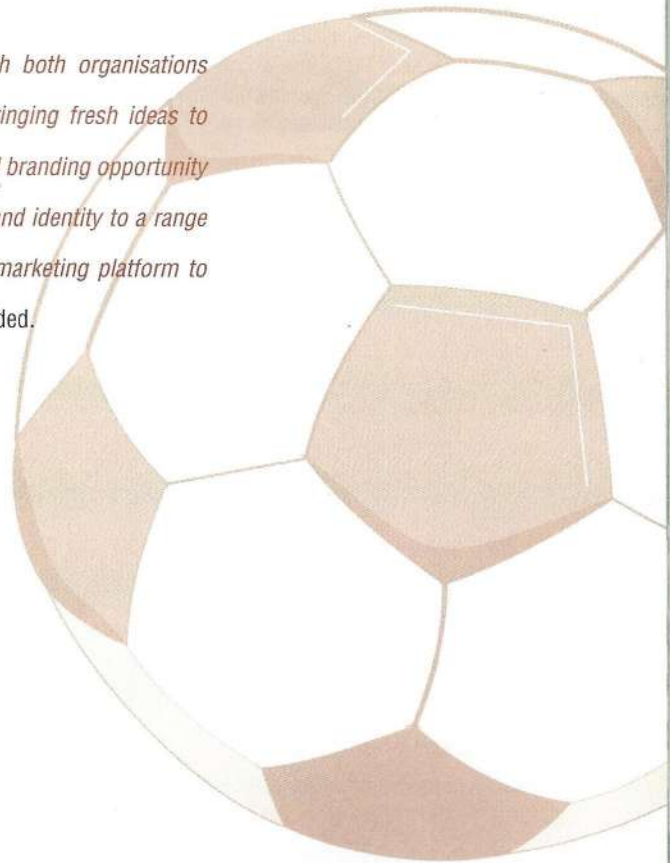
Thursday, 3rd December 1999

Northern Spirit were proud to announce the details of their new major sponsor - G3 Communications -and henceforth, the team would be known as the 'G3 Northern Spirit'.

The company was new in the business place and offered a full range of telecommunications products and services, leading Marketing Manager David Watson to say: *"The sponsorship deal is a natural extension of our ongoing marketing program.*

"It follows our company launch and an aggressive telesales campaign," he added.

"The sponsorship has a natural synergy with both organisations Northern Spirit and G3 Communications - bringing fresh ideas to their respective markets. We see this is an ideal branding opportunity for G3 Communications and reinforces our brand identity to a range of potential customers, and is also the ideal marketing platform to lead us into our next growth phase," he concluded.



northern
spirit
f.c.



ROUND NINE

Sunday, 6th December 1998

Sydney United 1

Sterjovski 38

G3 Northern Spirit 0

A match described as a 'must win' by coach Graham Arnold, the trip to Edensor Park to play Sydney United was the first of the big away derby games.

Spirit had more of the ball throughout the match but it was left to United to use it more effectively. Indeed, their tried and trusted method of dropping the ball in over the top to turn the defence while using the pace of Sterjovski, Ardone and Griffiths didn't appear to be working as planned as the Spirit defenders played with guile and stubborn determination.

The downside of the 45-minutes was the constant use of the long ball by United and the wide play of Spirit, although the contrasting styles made for good entertainment for the fans of both sides - especially as about half the crowd of 6,236, dubious by most estimations, were visiting Spirit supporters who, as usual, made plenty of noise, prompting one noted Sydney journalist to comment: *"The club's (Spirit) large support should take a bow for turning out in such great numbers away from home."*

Walter Ardone fired one in from 30 metres out which Paul Henderson in the Spirit goal had to tip away for a corner, while Matt Langdon, playing in his second successive match, sent over a cross that was headed away by sweeper Richard Plesa for a corner in the nick of time as Zane powered in to head home. Increasingly the first-half looked like heading towards a frustrating goal-less draw until United struck in the 39th minute against the run of play.

The tireless Velimir Kupresak, a veteran at 35-years of age, spotted the Spirit defence had pushed out and sent in a looping ball over the top that landed perfectly for the running Steve Berry. Collecting the ball in his stride, Berry ran on before squaring it for Mile Sterjovski, unmarked inside the box, to slot home his seventh of the season.

Robbie Slater had a quiet first-half but Langdon was proving a constant thorn in the side of the United defence as he made several penetrating runs down the left.

The second-half petered out as a spectacle with Spirit pushing forward constantly in search of an equaliser, but the problems with finding the right combination of strikers up front was evident once again.

Mutterings from the fans were beginning to grow and gather speed and Clayton Zane was to be the target. Depending on the side you favour, as a recognised Olyroo striker, Zane was still to find the net in eight outings, Spirit having scored just six times this season. The other important factor was that he was still getting into the right positions to score and on more than one occasion, the final ball in was played to his wrong side or just wasn't good enough. He also pulled players out of position to create space and time for his team-mates to steal through.

To make matters worse, both Robbie's - Slater and Enes - picked up yellow cards and would now face a one match automatic suspension.

Zane's contribution to the team, and work rate, couldn't really be faulted and although Arnold knew there was a problem in the scoring department, it wasn't time to press the panic buttons just yet.

To add to the injury woes of the club, Luke Casserly (leg), Mark Rudan (groin) and Phil Moss (foot) would be unable to train in the coming week, severely limiting the options of the coach as players started going down like nine-pins.

'Every cloud has a silver lining' and there was to be light at the end of the tunnel as Arnold thought long and hard about moving from his customary role in attack into the sweepers position. It was to prove one of the most astute decisions of the season, but that was all in the future.

DECEMBER

1998



Graham Arnold - "phone home"

Coach's comments: *"I told them before the game not to let them get behind us. The long ball that led to their goal was a nothing ball. There appears to be not enough hunger and passion in the team and the hardest thing for me to take is to see some of the players just going through the motions. We are a new team and nobody expects that we will be a cohesive unit right from the start. The worst thing is that with every week that passes we should be seeing an end to these problems on the horizon. Unfortunately, we are not. We are not scoring enough goals and until we find ways of breaking through the defence's we are coming up against, we are likely to struggle."*

What can I say about our fans? There must have been as many as United's and I reckon they gave them a fright when singing so loudly as we warmed up. Sadly we didn't give them a lot to cheer about and I can only ask they keep up the good work as it's one of the only things keeping me sane at the moment!"

Pumas: Crews, Plesa (Townsend 72), Kupresak, Vrkic, Burns, Ardone, Berry, Sterjovski (Mitchell 76), Caleta (Griffiths 61), Santalab, Eagleton.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Bilokapic, Zane (Bosnar 66), Watkins (Arnold 68), Enes, Moss (Cunico 57), Langdon.

Y/C: Pumas - Plesa
Spirit - Slater, Bilokapic, Enes

R/C: Nil

Ref: Simon Micallef

Att: 6,236

Pos: 9th

ROUND TEN

Monday, 14th December 1998

Canberra Cosmos 0

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Bilokapic 56p

Going into the match with six regular first team players out either injured or suspended, the G3 Northern Spirit faced the prospect of becoming the first club to yield points to Canberra Cosmos during the whole of 98/99 season to date.

Influential Cosmos player Norman Kelly limped from the field and was followed by Peter Buljan, suffering heat stroke from the weekend, inside the first 25 minutes.

Coach Tony Brennan had injected some backbone into this Canberra side after the departure of Rale Rasic and it was not the same dejected team that took the field against the Ericsson Cup new boys.

With so many regulars missing from the line-up, Spirit made very heavy weather of the first-half and with apprentices Paul Wearne and 17-year old Adam Snyder on the bench, a long night was forecast for the fans, again many making the trip down to Canberra and creating plenty of noise, most of which echoed around an almost deserted Bruce Stadium.

Spirit found it impossible to play with flair but more than made up for it with grit, commitment and determination, with Graham Arnold living up to his word and dropping back into the sweepers role and turning in a star performance. Arnold received a long gash down the right shin for his troubles but lead by example as Spirit battled away for a hard fought victory, the only goal of the game coming from the penalty spot in the 56th minute.

Clayton Zane, still searching for his first of the season, attempted a flick pass inside the area which referee Greg Levérton deemed was handled by substitute Paul Roberts.

Paul Bilokapic, making his 100th NSL appearance, immediately stepped up for the kick and beat 'keeper Vilson Knezevic by sending him the wrong way and condemning Canberra to a record 13th straight loss.

'Billy' was to say afterwards: "I scored six from six for United last season and was happy to continue where I left off. It wasn't a pretty game to watch, but we did enough to secure the three points and that is what we were after. Probably the most pleasing aspect was to see so many of our fans down here and although it wasn't a great game for them to watch, all we can say is that if they stick with us, we will put together some fantastic matches for them that they will remember."

It wasn't a match for the purists but it was a vital three points for Spirit.

DECEMBER

1998



Clayton Zane powers through

MILESTONE

Paul Bilokapic makes his 100th national league appearance and crowns it with the winning goal.

Adam Snyder makes his NSL debut as an 82nd minute substitute for Daniel Watkins.

Coaches comment: "In recent times I've been critical of our commitment but tonight we gave 100% and got the result we deserved. It was good to see the players roll up their sleeves and get stuck in to grind out a result in a difficult away tie. I was disappointed with the showing at Edensor Park last week and while it wasn't a perfect game against the Cosmos, the commitment was sensational. Clayton Zane didn't break his drought but he earned us a penalty and played with aggression, which is exactly what I wanted. He won everything in the air and proved the ideal target man. 'Kresh' (Marusic) stood in as captain well for the suspended Slater and although we didn't create too many chances against their brand of football, we never let them have a look in either. Rudan and Moss did well as markers and the defence in general had a strong night. There were some positive signs and with the way the guys responded in this match, maybe I'll be charting unfamiliar territory next week in having a few selection problems. It will be a nice headache to have for once."

Cosmos: Knezevic, Popovic, Wilson, Zelic, Marcina, Buljan (Musitano 26), Kelly (Roberts 20), Prenzoski (Burt 64), Magnacca, Miglietti, Langone.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Watkins (Snyder 82), Cunico, Moss, Langdon (Wearne 85). Sub not used: Stubbs-Mills

Y/C: Cosmos - Miglietti, Langone
Spirit - Bilokapic, Zane, Moss

R/C: Nil

Ref: Greg Levérton

Att: 1,704

Pos: 9th



PAUL BILOKAPIC - THE 'ENFORCER'

'Billy' spent much of his career with Sydney United and had, perhaps, gone slightly stale after going around the same traps for so long. Indeed, he admits:

"I needed a change. I was probably getting bored being at the same club if I'm being honest, and needed the challenge of a new club to improve my chances of playing overseas. I also hoped that it would enhance my prospects and help me to improve as a player so that I would be able to fulfil my maximum potential and play at the highest level. I'm capable of."

It didn't prove the greatest of starts for the powerfully built midfielder, especially after being sent-off in the second round match against the Glory in Perth:

"It's fair to say the season had its ups and downs but it certainly finished better than I ever expected. I struggled for probably the first three or four games and Graham Arnold had a word with me. I followed his advice because of his experience of playing at such a high level overseas and because I owed it to myself and the supporters. You could say it was a ragged start but I thought I was consistent after that."

Bilokapic is a larger than life character both on and off the field and showed he has what it takes to go all the way. He produced some performances of outstanding quality at times and to say that he is strong in the tackle, earning the new nickname of 'the Enforcer', is an understatement, although he did not always receive the plaudits he so richly deserved.

He had plenty of praise for the supporters too:

"Being in Australia, I never thought I'd see crowds like ours happen. It must scare the opposition to hear the roar of Spirit Point and other areas of the ground. I have to say that it is a real pleasure to play in front of them. The atmosphere is terrific and I look forward to doing it all again next season. They are fantastic."

Big 'Billy' became a crowd favourite during the 98/99 season. The fans love his nonsense approach, reliability and, for the girls, the cheeky grin.

Top player, top bloke.



PAUL BILOKAPIC

ROUND ELEVEN

Sunday, 20th December 1998

South Melbourne 2

Curcija 31,54p

G3 Northern Spirit 0

Meeting last years Grand Final winners on their own patch was never going to be easy but would prove an invaluable measuring stick as to just how much improvement had been made since the inception of the side. And they don't come much tougher than South Melbourne at the Bob Jane Stadium in Melbourne.

Adem Poric, Spirit's latest signing, made his debut for the club and for the first 20 minutes of the match had Souths on the backfoot and wondering what was happening. Not many teams came to their ground to take them on, especially when forcing four corners inside the first quarter of the game.

Mark Rudan found himself unmarked in the box but he tamely headed over from a Marusic corner before the provider himself had a shot well saved by Petkovic in the Souths goal after a teasing centre by Luke Casserly.

Clayton Zane was next to show as he tested the 'keeper after Robbie Enes capitalised on a Fausto De Amicis error to send the Spirit striker through. It was all one way traffic until Souths finally started to exert some pressure and slowly clawed their way back into the match after weathering the early storm.

Against the run of play, Souths took the lead in the 31st minute via a mistake from the usually dependable Paul Henderson in goal. Michael Curcija sent a thumping left foot volley crashing into the back of the net. The blame lay with Henderson as he failed to deal with a Clarkson free kick that was aimed for Vaughan Coveny. His attempted punch was sliced straight to Curcija who finished off superbly.

With Spirit once again playing catch-up football, Souths were able to gain the ascendancy and further chances fell to the goal scorer and Coveny. Indeed, Curcija could have had a hat-trick in the first 45 minutes and but for a magnificent save by Henderson, would certainly have met the break with a two goal cushion.

After 43 minutes Coveny and Paul Trimboli split the Spirit defence to create a wonderful opportunity for Curcija to increase the lead but Henderson saved well with his legs.

Kresimir Marusic should have levelled the scores on the stroke of half-time as a clever flick from new boy Poric sent him clean through. Alas, Spirit's woes in front of goal continued as the midfielder mis-timed his shot and tamely fired into the legs of Petkovic in almost tit-for-tat fashion as Curcija at the other end

Petkovic was again called into action early in the second-half as Spirit came out firing on all cylinders. Luke Casserly fired in but the Socceroo 'keeper pulled off a dramatic save to deny the former Marconi player.

Soon after, Mark Rudan was adjudged to have up-ended Curcija in the Spirit penalty area and Souths were awarded a spot kick. It was Curcija himself who got to his feet to hammer the ball past Henderson and double the home sides advantage.

Graham Arnold, who had continued in the sweepers role, pushed himself up front in an effort to get something out of the game but to little avail as Spirit found it impossible to break through a rock solid South Melbourne defence.

Souths coach Angie Postecoglou was full of praise for the visitors after the game:

"I can't remember a game where Michael Petkovic has had so much to do in goal," he said.

"Usually we cop a goal out of nowhere but today Spirit were getting into some very good positions and we had trouble containing them early on. Luckily, Petkovic and the rest of the defence stood up to it well and we managed to go on with it."

DECEMBER

1998



"Whose Michael Flattly?" Paul Bilokapic

The match was a marvellous advert for football, even when taking into account that Spirit were missing Robbie Slater through a hamstring injury and Souths were without suspended Goran Lozanovski and the injured Steve Panopoulos.

MILESTONE

Adem Poric, sent off for Sydney Olympic with Mark Rudan after 15-minutes of the opening match of the season, now takes his place along side him as a Spirit player.

Coaches comment: *"I was pretty happy with the way we played, it's just a shame we can't seem to score goals. I train the strikers more than the rest of the team, maybe too much, but in training everything seems to go in. We were well in the game until they scored their first goal, but even after that we had enough chances to get something out of the match. It still comes down to the fact that they took their chances and we didn't. South Melbourne are a great side. They absorbed our attack in the first 25-30 minutes and then put us away."*

Souths: Petkovic, Iosifidis, De Amicis, Orlic, Clarkson (Cuzzupe 85), Trimboli, Curcija (Tsekinis 80), Baser, Coveny (Anastasiadis 72), Goutzioulis, Polak.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly (Watkins 67), Marusic, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Enes, Moss, Langdon, Poric. Sub not used: Cunico, Wearne

Y/C: Souths - Goutzioulis
Spirit - Rudan, Zane, Enes

R/C: Nil

Ref: Eddie Lennie

Att: 6,206

Pos: 10th

ROUND TWELVE

Sunday, 27 December 1998

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Marusic 81

Gippsland Falcons 0

Gabriel 'Chi Chi' Mendez was to make his long awaited debut for the G3 Northern Spirit and it wouldn't take him too long to make an impact. After coming on as a 67th minute substitute for Matt Langdon, he cleverly set-up Marusic for the only goal of the game eleven minutes later.

Spirit dominated the match from start to finish and created almost too many chances to count, but it was the same old story in front of goal, unable to turn opportunity into reward.

Robbie Slater was pushed up front to partner Clayton Zane in yet another strike force combination and the early indications were that it would net a landslide victory for the north Sydney club.

Resolute defence and slack finishing made it tough going for those on the terraces. It's not that the new combo didn't prove the best move that Spirit had ever made as large numbers of Falcons players were behind the ball and made no secret of the fact that they had arrived in NSW with a point and were determined to return to the La Trobe Valley with it, or all three if they could steal a breakaway goal.

Graham Arnold admitted some weeks before that he was no longer able to continue his role as a striker, although the most experienced front-man at this fledgling club, because of the injuries he had sustained over the years and the fact that as a striker he had his back to the play for most of the game in order to time his runs into the box, continued at sweeper and was masterly in his distribution and was always there to clean up any loose balls in the danger zone.

When Arnold did move up into the attack, his silky runs into the area caused constant problems and always looked likely to make something happen and it was in one such move that the Falcons succumbed to the onslaught being hurled at them.

The player/coach led off on a dummy run in the 78th minute and Mendez, instead of trying to put over a cross in the tricky wind circulating Spirit Park, laid the ball off along the ground to Marusic, who's first time shot rippled the back of the net for his third of the season. He was booked for removing his shirt when celebrating the goal with the fans moments later.

Although the wind played up against Spirit in the second-half, far too many crosses were going astray, especially from the right wing which, under the circumstances, many pundits believed with hindsight should have been played on the ground.

That said, Marusic could have added a second in the 83rd when Robbie Slater, recovered from the ham-string injury that had plagued him in recent weeks, sent in a cross only for the maestro to see his effort cleared off the line by Levent Osman.

Gippsland had a chance to equalise late in the game when Archie Thompson, an U/23 international, tricked and jinked his way past Paul Bilokapic, who had another outstanding game, and created enough room to get in a snap shot. The ever alert Paul Henderson was alive to the situation and even though seeing the ball late, managed to get enough on it to send it around the post. It was the straw that finally broke the resistance of Falcons and they were not to threaten again in the dying moments of the match.

Robbie Slater, playing out of position up front, linked well with Clayton Zane with the possibility that this could become the new G3 Northern Spirit frontline partnership for some time.

The win took Spirit to ninth place in the table and Slater later revealed, cheekily, that as a player gets older, he normally moves back down the pitch. Here he was, 34-years old and he was going in the other direction!

"It's not my preferred position but we're a bit thin up front at the moment, so I may have to stay there and give them a hand," he said.

DECEMBER

1998



Paul Bilokapic receives his award for 100 NSL appearances from club chairman Remo Nogarotto

The worst of all possible news came at the end of the match when it was revealed that new signing Adem Poric was likely to miss the rest of the season after sustaining a bad knee injury just one-and-a-quarter games into his Spirit career.

The ghosts that haunted Spirit Park earlier in the term had come back to claim yet another victim, and the chances were, it wouldn't stop there either.

MILESTONE

Gabriel 'Chi Chi' Mendez finally makes his long awaited debut in a Spirit shirt.

Coaches comments: *"We keep making life difficult for ourselves because we can't score goals. I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but it's the same thing week after week. To say I'm relieved after this result is a mild understatement. We needed the three points if we are get through this goal drought and still be able to mount a challenge for the Top Six play-offs in May."*

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Enes, Langdon (Mendez 67), Poric (Cunico 21). Sub not used: Moss

Falcons: Jevdjovic, Hopkins, Osman, MacNicol, Bell, Thompson, Vargas, Hastie, Canosa, Puca (Savage 75), Armstrong (Beckvinovski 54). Sub not used: Anderson.

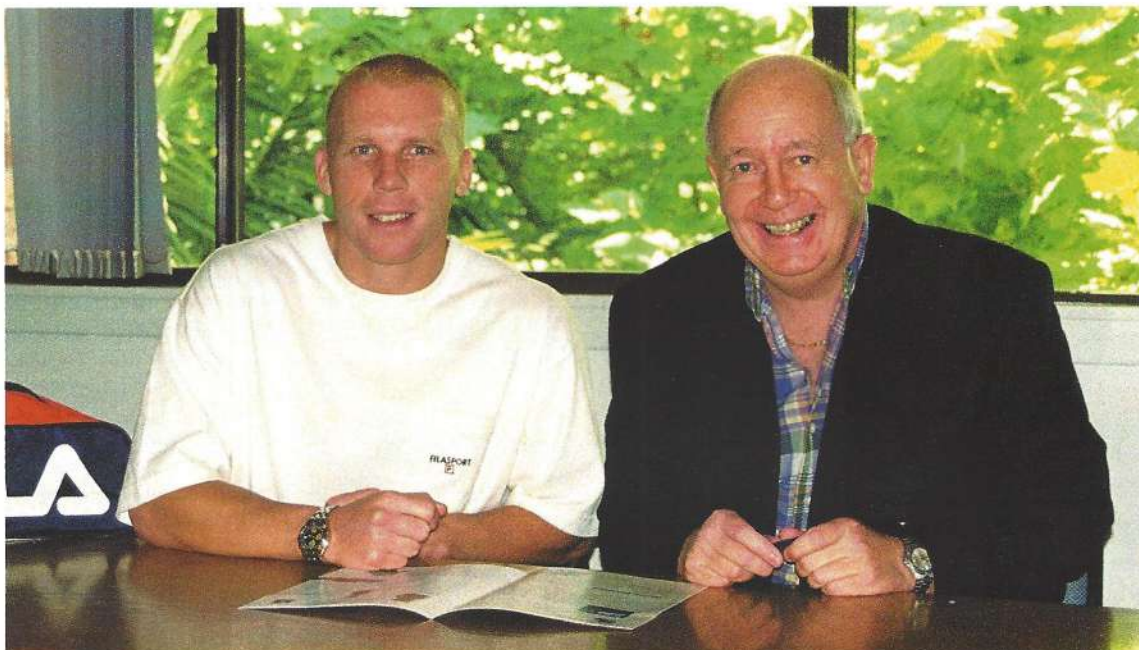
Y/C: Spirit - Rudan, Marusic, Slater, Enes
Falcons - Vargas, Armstrong

R/C: Nil

Ref: David Dwight

Att: 10,374

Pos: 9th



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ROUND THIRTEEN

Sunday, 3rd January 1999

Adelaide Sharks 2

Poimer 32

Gibson 89

G3 Northern Spirit 3

Crook 60

Zane 83

Marusic 85

On their previous trip to Hindmarsh Stadium, Northern Spirit had lost dismally to Adelaide City, after dominating the match in the opening 45 minutes, before going into the break at 0-1 down.

Many lessons had been learnt since then and the Adelaide Sharks offered a different approach to their neighbours and perennial Top Six specialists.

Graham Arnold was shown a yellow card in as early as the tenth minute for a sliding tackle that referee Sam Hesc took exception to and was to prove costly later in the game. (Hesc was to eventually hand out five yellow cards and one red, albeit a second yellow to Arnold. Of these, only one caution was for a home team player. Not that anything can be read into these figures, it all adds up to make Spirit look a dirty side, which couldn't be further from the truth).

Strangely enough, Spirit went into the half-time break at nil-one down yet again.

Alex Castro provided a pinpoint cross and Derek Poimer, replacing regular striker Hamilton Thorp up front who had been utilised as a marker for the ever dangerous Robbie Slater, was on hand and needed no second invitation to put the home side ahead in the 33rd minute. Poimer was unlucky not to add to his tally late in the half when a fiercely struck shot from fully 25 metres out cannoned onto the cross-bar.

Deja Vu for Spirit although this time they had something in the wings. That something was Ian Crook who returned to action after a 10 game absence through an injury sustained in Round two at Perth Oval.

'Crookie' replaced Michael Cunico after the half-time interval and Spirit's fortunes never looked back after that apart from a minor scare later in the match.

And it was the former England player who got the ball rolling with the equaliser with 63-minutes showing on the clock. A swerving 20 metre free-kick around the Sharks wall and into the bottom right hand corner of the net.

That strike sparked Spirit into action as they laid siege on a Sharks goal that was leading a charmed life until Clayton Zane scored his first goal for the club after 16 hours and 26 minutes of sheer torture for the former Breakers front man.

It was Crook who again set up the chance in the 83rd minute. He found Slater in space who cleverly chipped the ball on to Clayton Zane and after skipping his was past three defenders, fired into the net to give Spirit a deserved lead.

It was a relief for the lanky striker but all the more incredible as Spirit had been reduced to 10 men three minutes earlier when Graham Arnold received his second yellow card of the game and was sent-off for the first time in Australia after the referee deemed the player/coach had deliberately handled.

To compound matters for the Sharks, Spirit broke out from defence and added a third just two minutes later.

The Sydneysiders enjoyed a touch of luck when Slater passed to Kresimir Marusic and his skilful little back-heel flew into the net to give Spirit the luxury of a two goal cushion with one man short and only five minutes left of play.

In keeping with their season to date, Spirit were to cause their supporters some palpitations late in the game when they relaxed sufficiently for John Gibson to reduce the deficit to one when he scored a late consolation for the Sharks in stoppage time.

It turned out to be almost the last kick of the game and as the final whistle sounded, a relieved G3 Northern Spirit took home the points.

JANUARY

1999

MILESTONE

Graham Arnold receives his first red card in Australian football.

Coaches comment: "With regards to my sending off, it's never happened to me in Australia before and I've only ever been sent-off once, when I was in Japan. The referee was very inconsistent with his decisions and, to be honest, I didn't even feel the ball hit my hand. I was 35 metres away from goal and as I slipped over thought the ball had hit my chest. I feel it was a harsh decision. The game actually went for 54 minutes in the second-half and that helped the Sharks back into the match as we were by then down to ten men. It means that I will be out for the game against Newcastle at Spirit Park next Friday night, and we'll also be missing Paul Bilokapic and Mark Rudan because they've picked up their fourth yellow cards of the season tonight. On a brighter note, it was great to see 'Clacka' finding the net and hopefully he's now turned the corner. He was unlucky not to have added one or two more. It is a great weight off his shoulders now. Ian Crook's return is very welcome and it looks as though Robbie Enes will remain with the club until the end of the season before heading off for further trials in Europe."

Sharks: Wildy, Alagich, Castro, Souris, Thorp, Poimer, Duric, Gibson, Pezos, Artone (Vidakovic 80), Porter. Sub not used: Tibaldi, Westervelt.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic (Moss 86), Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Cunico (Crook 46), Enes, Langdon (Mendez 88).

Y/C: Sharks - Thorp
Spirit - Rudan, Marusic, Arnold, Bilokapic

R/C: Spirit - Arnold

Ref: Sam Hesc

Att: 2,089

Pos: 8th



Clacka in action

ROUND FOURTEEN

Friday, 8th January 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 0

Newcastle Breakers 0

After netting three times in the previous match, some thought the days of a scoring drought were over but, as some journalists would have you believe, Spirit fans petitioned for a 'real' striker to be purchased for the club? In reality, the supporters were petitioning for a better deal and more football coverage on Channel 7 television, as they had the rights to Ericsson Cup football. As the old adage mentions, *'Never let the truth get in the way of a good story'*.

Sadly, Spirit lapsed back into bad old habits but the loss of influential players made life difficult for the home side as they entertained a Newcastle Breakers team on the crest of their best ever run, five games without loss.

Clayton Zane, playing against his former club, had three good opportunities in the space of two minutes but failed to nail any of them, and with the Breakers coach, Lee Sterrey, pushing Andrew Roberts out wide on the left to nullify the threat posed by Luke Casserly, the crosses became a trickle before drying up completely.

Newcastle looked organised in defence and showed they could be dangerous on the counter-attack and could have snatched the points in a smash and grab style raid but for the bravery of Paul Henderson in the Spirit goal.

John Buonavoglia and Fouad Umlil both squandered chances with only Henderson to beat. Breakers striker John Buonavoglia had a great opportunity to put the visitors ahead in the 32nd minute when hitting a screamer from 25 metres out. Henderson was forced into a diving save as the ball arrowed towards the top left hand corner of the net. Moments later, Moroccan import Fouad Umlil had a similar effort tipped over the bar.

That, in essence, was as much as the Breakers would manage all night until Tom Haythornthwaite, signed from Canberra Cosmos, replaced Peter Ritchie in the 62nd minute and added some bite to the Breakers attack.

Zane and Gabriel Mendez looked to have formed a potent partnership up front in yet another restructured attack.

Bearing in mind that Tony Perinich was bought to partner Zane in attack, 'Pezza' was forced into a knee reconstruction before the start of the campaign after yet another freak training accident, 'Clacka' was forced to shoulder the burden of a lone strikers role for much of the season to date, which prompted Chairman Remo Nogarotto to say: *'Zane has had to carry the load on his own. We are not in the business of buying average quality players. I understand the frustration's of our supporters because I share it with them. It's death by a thousand cuts watching our team at present but we will not go out and buy a player for the sake of it. In reality, there is not a lot around at the moment.'*

Spirit continued to launch assaults on Bob Catlin in the Breakers goal and it looked as though the prayers of the supporters had been answered in stoppage time when Mattie Langdon was cynically scythed down by Chris Tanchevski inside the box with only Catlin to beat.

Referee Jeff Tippet saw nothing wrong with the incident to leave an incredulous Spirit team looking on in disbelief.

After the match, Breakers coach Lee Sterrey was to admit: *'It was a penalty from 100 yards away,'* while the loyal supporters left Spirit Park with the feeling of 'being robbed'.

A nil-all draw was the final outcome as the club was left to rue a catalogue of scorned chances.

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Coaches comment: *"We played quite well considering seven of our first team were out, two long term, and we had to include five 18-year olds in the side. It was frustrating to see the penalty not awarded. Every single person in the ground, including the Newcastle fans and their goalkeeper, Bobby Catlin, thought it was a penalty but nothing happens. We dominated the first 30 minutes of the match and were easily a class above them all over the park, but we got nothing more out of the result than they did."*

Spirit: Henderson, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Zane (Watkins 89), Cunico, Enes, Moss, Wearne (Crook 52), Langdon, Mendez (Snyder 67).

Breakers: Catlin, Pryce, McManus, Sprod, Buonavoglia, Umlil (Tanchevski 75), Shannon, Roberts, Wilson (Sanderson 85), Yoon, Ritchie (Haythornthwaite 63).

Y/C: Spirit - Wearne
Breakers - Pryce

R/C: Nil

Ref: Jeff Tippet

Att: 13,206

Pos: 8th



Gabriel "Chi Chi" Mendez

The Sydney Challenge Cup



Although not an original concept, the Canberra Cup having been played previously, it was new to Sydney and generated much interest after being put forward by the General Manager of Sydney Olympic - Frank Martin.

In simple terms, Sydney would find out who the top side was by holding a tournament within a tournament. By using the results of the scheduled Ericsson Cup matches between the four Sydney clubs - Spirit, Marconi, Olympic & United - the top club would be determined without the need for extra matches and with a total disregard for league position.

The rules of the competition would be as follows:

- If two teams finish equal top, the winner is decided by goals for and against,
- If goals for and against are equal, it is decided on goals scored,
- If goals scored are equal, winner decided by result of match containing both,
- If the result was a draw, the team that scored first in that game is deemed the winner,
- If the draw was nil-all, joint winners are declared.

In a novel attempt to increase attacking play and enterprising football, a points system with a difference was to be introduced:

- Win (home) = 3 points
- Win (away) = 4 points
- Draw = 1 point each
- Loss = 0 points
- 3 Goals + = 1 extra point

As the season had started, some derby games having already taken place, it was deemed that as each club had three more matches against the other local rivals, the championship would be decided over these performances.

- 15th Jan 1999 - G3 Northern Spirit v Marconi Fairfield
- 24th Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic v G3 Northern Spirit
- 26th Jan 1999 - Sydney United v Marconi Fairfield
- 29th Jan 1999 - G3 Northern Spirit v Sydney United
- 31st Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Marconi Fairfield
- 14th Feb 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Sydney United

Northern Spirit would kick off the tournament when taking on Marconi Fairfield in the next round of the Ericsson Cup in a match that promised plenty of fireworks, both on and off the pitch.

In a season that looked like it was business as usual for the team from the western districts, they were handily placed in third spot on the competition ladder at the time, perhaps they already had designs on the crystal trophy and were coming to Spirit park to kick-start those aspirations?

ROUND FIFTEEN

Friday, 15th January 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 4

Bilokapic 23

Slater 28

Marusic 40

Watkins 85

Marconi Fairfield 0

As if somehow the mists had cleared and allowed the Spirit forwards a sight of goal for almost the first time during the campaign, Marconi Fairfield were to feel the force of a packed Spirit Park and, as one journalist reported: *"They may have come as Stallions, but they surely left looking like Shetland ponies on the end of this 0-4 trouncing at the hands of a rampaging G3 Northern Spirit side hungry for goals and good football."*

17,507 fans were on hand to watch a game that, had it been a boxing match, would have been stopped long before the end of the first-half.

Clayton Zane was away on international duty but in his absence, Paul Bilokapic, Robbie Slater, Kresimir Marusic and the 18-year old Danny Watkins found the net to answer some of the critics who believed that Spirit could play up to the 18-yard box but couldn't go on with it from there.

Spirit totally dominated the game from the outset and were never to relinquish their grip.

Ian Crook helped the proceedings along in the 24th minute when his free-kick found Bilokapic ghosting in at the far post to head Spirit into the lead when, in truth, they could already have been three up.

Marusic was like a knife through butter and created chances at will against a Marconi defence lacking in confidence and looking as though they had never played together before. With the midfield wizard dazzling the back-line, former Stallion Luke Casserly and young Mattie Langdon were able to exploit the room down the flanks as Marusic continually drew the defenders in toward him with a masterful display of footwork, skill and sheer class.

Marconi 'keeper, David Aceski, hardly had time to recover from the first shock when four minutes later a 25-metre thunderbolt from stand-in striker Robbie Slater left the hapless custodian stranded and bending over to pluck the ball from the net once more.

Spirit Park was awash with noise and colour as the fans relished two well worked goals and dared to believe that this would indeed be the night the team would deliver the goals they had all been waiting for.

The contest was over before half-time as a third nail entered the coffin of the Fairfielders'. 'Marusic the Magnificent' slotted home his fifth of the season as Spirit cantered to a three-nil lead.

In an ironic quirk of fate, Zane played only 25 minutes for the Olyroos on the same night before leaving the field with a back injury that would put him in doubt for the following weeks match.

Danny Watkins found himself on the score sheet once more as Spirit unleashed an attacking display of football not witnessed in the Ericsson Cup for many a year. In the dying moments of the game he slotted home to put the icing on the cake and lift the frustration's of the crowd at long last.

Marconi coach, former Soccerroo stalwart Frank Farina, was full of praise after the match.

"We have players who are overpaid and under-achievers. We didn't compete and the first two goals we gave away were silly," he said.

"We were completely outplayed, outclassed and can consider ourselves very fortunate it wasn't eight," he concluded.

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Coaches comment: *"What an absolutely magnificent performance from the team tonight. I've said for some time that we would click against a team one day soon and that happened to be tonight against Marconi. We've been playing fairly well all season but have not been able to find the net with anything like the consistency needed at this level. We have a tough schedule over the next week with three games in six days and if we can take this sort of form into those games, we'll be looking very good for the finals. On the question of Clayton Zane, I've heard he's hurt his back and though you ask if he'll return to the starting eleven next week, all I can say is let me enjoy this weekend first. Then we'll see what happens after that. I've been asked why I haven't used Danny Watkins much this season and the reason is that when you've got 18-year old kids in the side, they can only sustain a certain amount of games at a consistent level. He did that in the first 5-6 weeks of the season and then had a patch where his form dipped a bit. He was really feeling the pinch, so I let him sit back, gave him two weeks off and he came back as fresh as anything. He had a super game tonight."*

Spirit: Henderson, Crook (Cunico 32), Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Watkins, Enes (Mendez 88), Langdon (Moss 79).

Stallions: Aceski, M.Babic, Phillips (McDonald 56), Longo, Kim, Maloney, Awaritefe, Trajanovski, Zoric (Z.Babic 46), Smith, Gibson (Farrah 68).

Y/C: Spirit - Crook, Slater
Stallions - Phillips, Awaritefe

A/C: Nil

Ref: Eugene Brazzale

Att: 17,507

Pos: 8th

The *Sydney* Challenge



U P D A T E

G3 Northern Spirit, in addition to gaining three points for an Ericsson Cup triumph, also won the same amount for the home win in the 'Sydney Challenge' and then collected the extra point for scoring three or more goals in the inaugural match. Next stop was to be at Belmore the following weekend and another encounter with a 'challenge' opponent - Sydney Olympic.

- 15th Jan 1999 - **G3 Northern Spirit** 4 Marconi Fairfield 0
- 24th Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic v **G3 Northern Spirit**
- 26th Jan 1999 - Sydney United v Marconi Fairfield
- 29th Jan 1999 - **G3 Northern Spirit** v Sydney United
- 31st Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Marconi Fairfield
- 14th Feb 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Sydney United

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS	G/D
G3 NORTHERN SPIRIT	1	1	0	0	4	0	4	+4
Sydney Olympic	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sydney United	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marconi Fairfield	1	0	0	1	0	4	4	-4

HIS MASTERS VOICE (PT2) HALF-TERM REPORT

"Considering all our major injuries and early suspensions, I was quite happy with our placement at the time. I knew during the second round of the season it would get better for two reasons: 1/ Some of those injured players would come back and 2/ we would get better as a team," said Arnold.

What many couldn't believe was the outstanding support this brand new club was consistently getting, both at home and away: *"In the beginning it took the supporters time to get to know the players and sometimes the atmosphere was quite weird, but once the supporters got to know us, and we them, their songs and the atmosphere was brilliant. The supporters in the second round also began to travel, which made our away games easier and I still can't believe the humour and noise they generated. Sensational,"* added the player/coach.

With all teams having been played once, now was the time to put the heads down and drive for the elusive Top Six placing and Final's football.

ROUND SIXTEEN

Sunday, 24th January 1999

Sydney Olympic 2

Cardozo 43, 87

G3 Northern Spirit 3

Slater 9, 29

Enes 54

Sydney Olympic had come to North Sydney Oval for Spirit's inaugural match in the NSL and taken away the points after a 2-nil win over the Ericsson Cup new boys.

To the supporters of the north shore club, this was a rematch they couldn't miss and arrived at Belmore in previously unheard of numbers and followed implicitly the directions of the Olympic officials - arrive early, stake your claim and stay put.

In front of Olympic's second highest crowd of the season to date - 9,151 - this would be the first opportunity for a quick revenge of that fateful first encounter, and another opportunity to press home their advantage in the 'Sydney Challenge', but as would prove the norm, if Spirit were to win, they wouldn't do it the easy way.

Around 3,500 Spirit fans made the trek to Belmore and left no-one in any doubt as to who they were supporting. The decibel level rose during a near 45-minute rendition of songs, chants and ditties that reached from the sublime to the ridiculous whilst keeping everyone amused.

They didn't have long to wait for a reason to cheer even louder as Robbie Slater gave the visitors the lead after 10 minutes of play. Brett Emerton only managed to head down into his own box from a Marusic centre. With the defence unable to clear, Slater pounced to force the ball home from 11 metres out.

From jubilation to consternation in the 28th minute when Mark Rudan received his second red card of the season against this opposition, and from the same referee. Emerton set off on a block-busting run from midfield and Rudan inadvertently clipped the heels of the Olympic player whilst attempting to avoid him, and as he went tumbling down referee Simon Micallef had no second thoughts on producing the red card, albeit harshly after some of the tactics employed by Olympic's defenders.

Two minutes later and the Spirit fans raised the roof as Slater again got on the scoresheet.

Robbie Enes floated in a teasing free-kick for Paul Bilokapic to bring under control with his right foot. While still off balance, he flicked the ball on to Slater with his left peg and the ginger-haired mid-fielder-turned-striker almost burst the back of the net.

With only ten men, Spirit were proving a real handful to contain but the home side thought they had finally found the answer in stoppage time of the first-half.

Brett Emerton, on another surging run, was tackled by Mattie Langdon and the loose ball fell inviting for Pablo Cardozo, showing a cool head, to finish with his left and bring the half-time score in a pulsating match to an odd goal in three deficit for the home team.

Ante Juric, lucky to be on the pitch after committing a far worse looking foul when bringing down Slater from behind prior to Spirit's first goal, given the sending-off of Rudan later on, had the chance to equalise four minutes after the restart when Mark Brennan swung over a dangerous corner. Juric met the ball with power but his header was brilliantly covered by Henderson in goal to snuff out the opportunity.

Mehmet Durakovic was the next to show but he saw his powerfully driven 35-metre effort tipped over the bar by the young Spirit goalkeeper.

Olympic were to pay dearly for those costly misses as Spirit were to regain their two goal lead.

Marusic found livewire Robbie Enes breaking out of midfield with a beautiful pass that dissected the Olympic defence as they pressed forward for the equaliser.

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Gathering with his right foot, Enes fired home from the edge of the box with his left to give Spirit an unassailable lead, although there was much more to come in this game.

With Spirit working hard to stay in the game after losing Rudan so early, tiredness was setting in and further chances were falling the way of Olympic.

Cardozo was on hand to stab a Peter Tsekenis cross straight into the waiting gloves of Paul Henderson after 70-minutes before Enes almost grabbed his second of the match, and Spirit's fourth, with five minutes remaining.

Latching on to a perfectly timed square ball from substitute Gabriel Mendez, Enes saw his shot flash past the upright. Had it gone in, there would have been no way for Olympic to get back into the game.

At long last Olympic threw caution to the wind as they tried to square the match and in the 88th minute reduced the visitors lead to one when Carlos Gonzalez was awarded a penalty after being brought down in the box.

Cardozo strode confidently up and put away the opportunity to leave Spirit with a few anxious minutes to hang on to their hard fought lead.

The relief when the final whistle sounded was visible on the faces of the exhausted Spirit players, especially for a defence that had played with a man short for over an hour.

Credit must be paid to Paul Bilokapic, Phil Moss, Graham Arnold, Paul Henderson and Daniel Watkins, sacrificed as a striker and pulled back when Rudan was ordered from the field, for their efforts in this gutsy win, especially in the second-half of the game when they put their bodies on the line for the team as Spirit finished as the first away side to win at Belmore this season.

It gave the club a commanding lead in the 'Sydney Challenge', which originated from this very ground, but Sydney United were yet to enter the fray.

Coaches comment: "Being without Ian Crook and Luke Casserly, losing them before the game, was a major loss for us. If we had had our normal eleven we would have played differently, however, I watched Olympic play a couple of times recently and thought that if we packed the midfield, it would force them out wide. Slater is still as mobile as ever and Paul Henderson, for mine, is the best goal-keeper in the league on present form. This month is so important for us as we still have both Sydney United and Perth Glory to play at home. I think the biggest problem with the referee's at the moment is inconsistency. You can't tell me there was a difference between the challenge of Ante Juric and that of Mark Rudan. Juric receives yellow, Rudan receives red? This is a problem that needs to be looked at and fixed."

Olympic: Bouhoutos, Tsekenis, Brennan (Baillie 60), Thomas, Emerton (Gonzalez 80), Tome (Kalantzis 60), Cardozo, Juric, Culina, Durakovic, Blagojevic.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Marusic, Slater (Mendez 72), Arnold, Bilokapic, Watkins, Cunico (Bosnar 83), Enes, Moss, Langdon (Wearne 66).

Y/G: Olympic - Tsekenis, Kalantzis, Juric, Culina
Spirit - Bosnar, Enes, Langdon

R/C: Spirit - Rudan

Ref: Simon Micallef

Att: 9,151

Pos: 6th

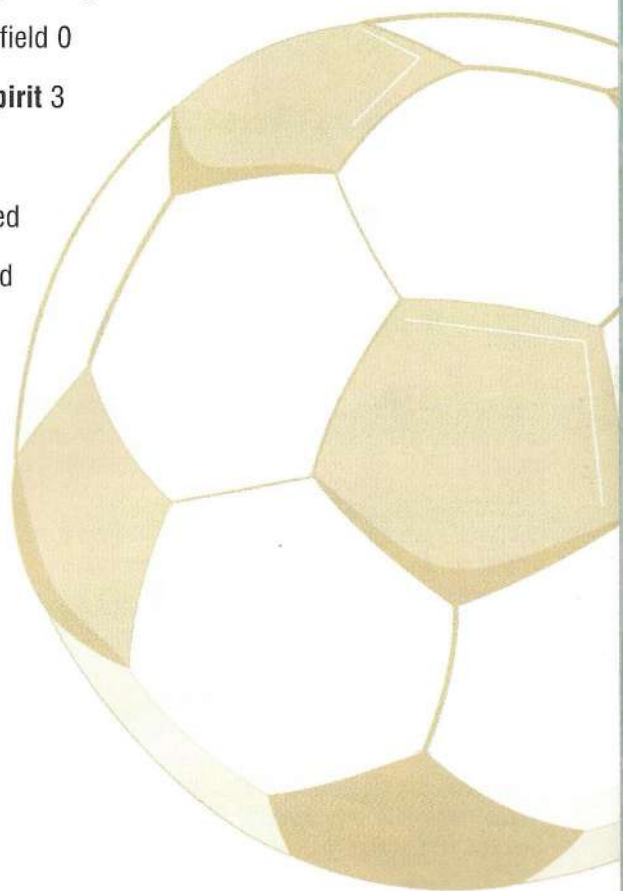
The Sydney Challenge

U P D A T E

G3 Northern Spirit took the challenge tournament by the scruff of the neck when beating Sydney Olympic on their own turf, throwing down the gauntlet to all other Sydney clubs that, although the three NSL points were the major consideration in these games, if they wanted to be 'top dogs' in this city, they would have to raise their game to be so. This particular match netted the visitors four points for the away win PLUS the extra point for scoring three goals or more.

- 15th Jan 1999 - **G3 Northern Spirit** 4 Marconi Fairfield 0
- 24th Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic 2 **G3 Northern Spirit** 3
- 26th Jan 1999 - Sydney United v Marconi Fairfield
- 29th Jan 1999 - **G3 Northern Spirit** v Sydney United
- 31st Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Marconi Fairfield
- 14th Feb 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Sydney United

northern
spirit
f.c.



	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS	G/D
G3 NORTHERN SPIRIT	2	2	0	0	7	2	9	+5
Sydney Olympic	1	0	0	1	2	3	0	-1
Sydney United	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Marconi Fairfield	1	0	0	1	0	4	0	-4

ROUND SEVENTEEN

Tuesday, 26th January 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Cunico 73

Perth Glory 0

Ten goals in the last four games for Spirit was making a mockery of the critics who said they couldn't find the net. However, the visit of Perth Glory on Australia Day would certainly be the immovable object meeting the irresistible force.

Everyone suspected the odd goal would get the result in this one but believed it would be a real treat to watch, especially after having Casserly and Bilokapic sent-off in the corresponding fixture and losing Ian Crook to a knee ligament injury for several weeks. The battle lines drawn, a classic encounter was played out before almost 18,000 fans at Spirit Park.

Mark Rudan and Robbie Enes would be missing through suspension but 'keeper Paul Henderson wasn't troubled throughout the match, thanks to the tireless efforts of Phil Moss and Paul Bilokapic, both of whom proved worthy replacements.

Glory skipper Gareth Naven was ordered from the field after 25-minutes of play for a crude challenge on Gabriel Mendez. With just over a quarter of the match gone, Mendez had tormented the visiting defence and that frustration was never more evident than in this incident.

The visitors were forced onto the defensive with their captains departure but can think themselves lucky not to have been behind at this stage of the game as the G3 Northern Spirit threatened to run away with the match.

Slater and Marusic were gelling in the latest front line partnership and the signs were clear that they now both knew what the other was going to do at any given time. It was this that had accounted for some of the sparkling displays in recent weeks, plus the determination and grit the rest of the side were showing.

Spirit were having problems finding the net and thanks to some stout defending and the often brave goalkeeping of Danny Milosevic, exhibited the patience needed at this level.

Paul Bilokapic had his penalty attempt saved well by Milosevic in the 67th minute, the first time he had failed from the spot in eight attempts stretching back to the previous season.

Frustration turned to joy when 19-year old Michael 'Coons' Cunico found the net from 25-metres out. Such venom did he hit the shot with that it was already bulging the back of the onion bag while the Perth 'keeper was still only halfway through his despairing dive. It was Cunico's first goal in the Ericsson Cup.

"I think I hit it quite well," said the softly spoken Cunico after the game adding: "It was more of a chip really."

Cunico had had terrible luck at that end of the ground all season and saw several of his efforts come bouncing back into play off the woodwork in various games.

"I've not had much luck down that end, so I just hit it. I didn't place the ball as I normally would, I just hit it," he ended coyly.

The win took the G3 Northern Spirit to fourth place in the league and allowed them some respite from the chasing pack.

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"Coons" Celebrates His "chip"

MILESTONE

Before the match kicked-off, a loosely based 'Four Nation' tournament took place between England, Scotland, Ireland and Cornwall. Modified rules were the order of the day and after playing the initial round on North Sydney Oval No.2 ground, the final two matches of the series were played in front of the ever growing band of supporters who had 'grabbed the Spirit'.

Ireland were the eventual winners, led by the irrepressible 'Aido', and were presented with the inaugural 'Spirit Of Australia Day Challenge Trophy'.

Communications experts G3 supplied the playing shirts for all four teams and the tournament was a raging success according to the fans and those who took part.

Manly Warringah Referees Association supplied the officials for the day and controlled the matches with aplomb, diplomacy and with a sense of good natured humour. The officials were (in no particular order): Greg Coupland, Don Gale, Graeme Kellow, Vrezh Movsessian, Peter Robson and Colin Stocks.

All in all, a wonderful day.

Coaches comment: *"If 'Coons' only chipped that goal, I wish I could chip the ball that well! After what we went through at Belmore two days ago, I'm very happy with the outcome of this game. It was a backs to the wall win over Olympic and I did worry how our younger players would pull up after giving 110% in that match. They've answered that question today. They have been superb all season and haven't let the club, me or themselves down. They've certainly come of age as first team regulars after the displays of the last fortnight."*

Spirit: Henderson, Marusic (Bosnar 90), Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Watkins, Cunico, Moss (Stubbs-Mills 83), Langdon, Mendez. Sub not used: Sobczyk

Glory: Milosevic, Trajkovski (Strudwick 85), Miller, Hay, Naven, Markovski, Despotovski (Halpin 78), Boutsianis, Garcia, Deans, Circati. Sub not used: Wilkinson.

Y/C: Glory - Milosevic, Miller, Despotovski, Deans, Circati.
R/C: Glory - Naven
Ref: Mark Shield
Att: 17,722
Pos: 4th

ROBBIE SLATER - LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Another Socceroo player that had plied his trade overseas for many years, including winning the English Premiership title with Blackburn Rovers, returned to Australia to team up with his great mate Graham Arnold for G3 Northern Spirit's first tilt at the title, and in so doing picked up the captains armband for his troubles.

The 'Bulldog' leads by example and never gives anything less than 100% on the pitch and in training, epitomising just what it takes to make it to the top. His performances throughout the season were nothing short of breath-taking at times, making a mockery of those who said he was too old to reproduce his best at this level.

Slater remains a character within the code, always dropping one-liners into any conversation and offering advice to those that would listen. But for all the success and star status, he is always prepared to talk to the fans at any time, never being anything but honest about his performance.

Striking up an instant relationship with the supporters, Slater remains a favourite son in association football, never believing he would ever finish his career with a professional club in Australia, let alone Sydney, the prodigal son returned - back to the future.

As he himself puts it: *"I've been enormously proud to be the captain of the Spirit in their first year. I've been taken aback by the response from the supporters and I have to admit that when I was invited to come back and join the new club, while with Wolverhampton Wanderers in England at the time, I was sceptical having already been involved in the NSL before which, with no disrespect intended, left a lot to be desired".*

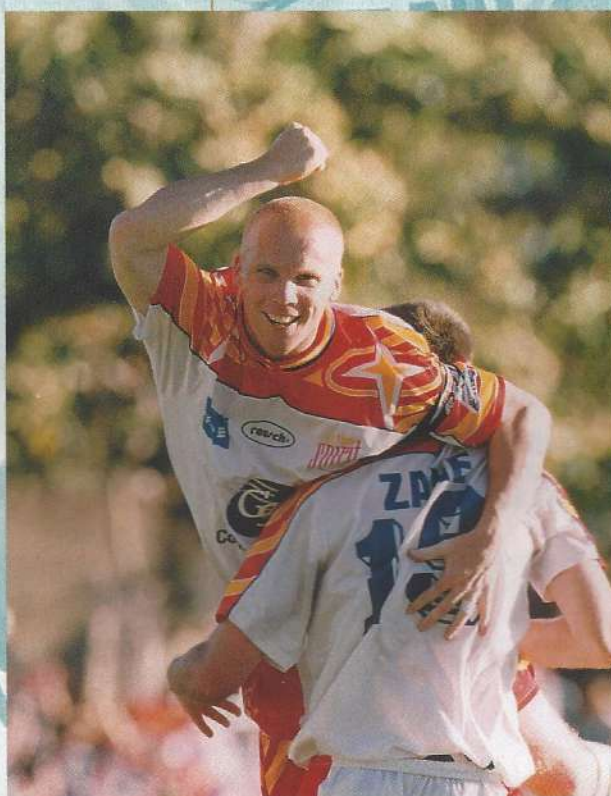
He went on to say: *"I really feel that we've only scratched the surface and firmly believe that this club will go on to become the dominant force and leading light in Australian football, breaking the monopoly of sports such as Rugby League and AFL and putting the code into its rightful place."*

As the hordes of Spirit fans cry out - "There's only one Robbie Slater."



SLATER

ROBBIE



ROUND EIGHTEEN

Friday, 29th January 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Marusic 68

Sydney United 2

Burns 44

Griffiths 83

If ever the Spirit Park woodwork jinx was to go against the side, this was to be the match that ensured it would go down in folklore.

Sydney United were suffering financial worries, their players were still waiting to be paid and home crowds were virtually non-existent but for all the problems they had endured off the pitch, coach Dave Mitchell had a team full of gutsy players and a side worthy of challenging for the top.

In the fifth minute, Kresimir Marusic put a free header over the bar against one of his old clubs and within 13 minutes, Daniel Watkins then crashed his headed effort against it. It wouldn't be the first time the frame would come to the aid of the visitors this night.

Watkins then squandered perhaps the best chance of the game in the 37th minute when, with an open goal beckoning, he mis-kicked the ball and the opportunity disappeared.

Jacob Burns added salt to the wound when he opened the scoring for United three minutes into first-half stoppage time after being left unmarked inside the box.

Gabriel Mendez was thwarted by the left-hand upright after 55 minutes and another youngster to step up from the youth side for his starting debut - Jacek Sobczyk - sent his shot crashing into the right-hand upright just nine minutes later.

Steve Berry and Jacob Burns were not going to let the home side have it all their own way and threatened occasionally in this very entertaining game. They exploited the space left in defence as Spirit surged forward in search of an equaliser, which came in the 69th minute and was well deserved.

Marusic fired in a shot from 25-metres that would surely be in the running for the 'Goal of the Season' awards. Swerving, dipping and flying past the hand of 'keeper Andrew Crews in the United goal and nestling into the top left-hand corner.

With the clock ticking down, it looked as though an evenly matched contest would finish level, handing Spirit the 'Sydney Challenge' before all the matches had been completed.

Joel Griffiths, turning down the option of playing for the north Sydney side, preferring to take the chance at United where he thought he would get more first team opportunities, was in the right spot at the right time to determine the outcome in the final moments.

86 minutes had gone when the ball fell inviting at his feet and he stroked it home from just outside the six-metre box.

He revealed later that he *'only had to keep my head'* for United to score an upset win.

His celebrations after scoring left much to be desired and a very sour taste in the mouths of those who stand in Spirit Point. It was not justifiable.

With Crews hardly able to stand in the United goal after tearing a groin muscle, the outfield players kept Spirit in check for the remaining few minutes of the game although this must be one win that the visitors can count on as being very, very lucky.

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MILESTONE

Jacek Sobczyk takes his place in the starting line-up for the first time and his NSL debut.

Coaches comment: *"This is one that definitely got away. Lady Luck wasn't with us at all tonight and we had enough chances in the first 20-minutes to really make life hard for them. At the beginning of the week I would have settled for six points from these three games - Olympic, Glory and United - as they have been setting the pace this season. When we played United at Edensor Park, I gave the players one hell of a blast afterwards for not 'putting in'. Since then, we have won six, drawn one and lost one match. I know their club has financial problems but I would be sad to see them forced to close down and I wish them well in finding a solution."*

Spirit: Henderson, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Watkins, Cunico, Moss, Langdon, Mendez, Sobczyk (Zane 87). Sub not used: Bosnar, Stubbs-Mills

Pumas: Crews, Barrett, Plesa, Vrkic, Burns, Ardane (A.Moric 34), Berry, Bennett, Sterjovski (Day 85), Griffiths, Santalab. Sub not used: Townsend.

Y/C: Pumas - Plesa, Vrkic, Griffiths

R/C: Nil

Ref: Gerry Connolly

Att: 17,024

Pos: 4th



Danny Watkins - "on the ball"

The Sydney Challenge

U P D A T E



The G3 Northern Spirit v Sydney United result would leave the table toppers with nine points and a goal difference of Plus 4. With United having won against Marconi (H) and Spirit (A), it meant they would have to go to Belmore and get something out of the match to be crowned as the kings of Sydney. That wouldn't take place for a fortnight yet and there were other games to be played and points to be won if the G3 Northern Spirit were to realise Graham Arnold's first dream - the Top Six play-offs.

- 15th Jan 1999 - **G3 Northern Spirit** 4 Marconi Fairfield 0
- 24th Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic 2 **G3 Northern Spirit** 3
- 26th Jan 1999 - Sydney United 3 Marconi Fairfield 2
- 29th Jan 1999 - **G3 Northern Spirit** 1 Sydney United 2
- 31st Jan 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Marconi Fairfield
- 14th Feb 1999 - Sydney Olympic v Sydney United

northern
spirit
f.c.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS	G/D
G3 NORTHERN SPIRIT	3	2	0	1	8	3	9	+4
Sydney Olympic	1	0	0	1	2	3	0	-1
Sydney United	2	2	0	0	5	3	8	+2
Marconi Fairfield	2	0	0	2	2	7	0	-5

ROUND NINETEEN

Saturday, 6th February 1999

Brisbane Strikers 5

Tollenaere 34

Zoricich 60

Laybutt 61

Meredith 63

Hughes 69

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Arnold 85

Not too much can be said for this game except that it was one of those that couldn't possibly ever happen again. It was a night when the G3 Northern Spirit players just didn't show up for the game and had been replaced by exact replicas of the team. It was probably a night when the fabled 'dustbins' would have done a better job.

Going into the break at just one-nil down, Spirit coach Graham Arnold must have thought there was a good chance of getting something out of the game if the team kept their shape and stuck to the game plan, although he must have been disappointed that the goal was conceded right on the stroke of half-time. Not the first time that had happened this season.

Reece Tollenaere managed to deflect a Jeremy Harris shot past Henderson in the 44th minute to give the Strikers the lead, but Spirit could have themselves hit the front four minutes earlier when Robbie Slater headed down for an easy tap in from a Mattie Langdon corner. The problem was, no-one was there to add the finishing touch.

That said, the Brisbane Strikers created and took their chances when presented, especially in an eight minute period of the second-half.

Chris Zoricich hit a strapping free-kick on the hour mark to double the Strikers lead and within two minutes it was 3-nil when defender Steve Laybutt found the net.

Nick Meredith, with his right foot, made it four and youngster Des Hughes completed the rout in the 68th minute when his shot went in off the underside of the bar.

Graham Arnold grabbed a late, late consolation goal but it was just a case of too little, too late.

The G3 Northern Spirit players will never play this badly again in years and as for the Strikers, they will most likely never have such good fortune in as long either, three of their goals coming from deflections.

At least this match was now out of the way and perhaps the best that can be said for it is something done better by the coach.



Arnie - Graham Arnold

FEBRUARY 1999

Coaches comment: "It's very rare in football when all eleven players for a team have an off day at the same time, but that's what happened in Brisbane. We simply were murdered by the Strikers. You can sit and dwell on something like this but I tend to feel that the kids who have done a magnificent job for us and played so well together this season, collectively had a bad night together also. Things like this will always happen, to any club, from time-to-time and I feel I've learnt a lot more about the side after this. Now we will see what the character of the team really is, how much heart they've got. The 18-year olds tend to run around and carry on for 90 minutes in most matches now but they could barely keep going for 20 on Saturday night. Nothing seemed to go our way, but that's football. Now we have to concentrate on getting it right in front of our own fans against Carlton in the next round."

Strikers: Bolton, Gwynne (Davidson 79), Zoricich, Laybutt, Tollenaere (North 81), Wehrman, Harris, Meredith (Knipe 76), Srhoj, Hughes, Steffanuto.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Watkins (Zane 11), Cunico, Enes, Moss (Bosnar 81), Langdon (Mendez 60).

Y/C: Nil

R/C: Nil

Ref: Eddie Lennie

Att: 5,436

Pos: 5th

ROUND TWENTY

Sunday, 14th February 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 3

Arnold 45

Slater 58

Marusic 65

Carlton 1

Lapsansky 19

In front of the lowest home crowd of the season - just 8,328 loyal supporters making the effort - witnessed Spirit turn in a sparkling performance and dominating a match they never looked likely to early on.

In fairness to the fans, the game was being shown 'live' on television (even in Sydney), the weather was unbelievably hot, kick-off was at 5.00pm on a Sunday afternoon and not the usual Friday night and, last but not least, it was Valentines Day.

Spirit struggled to get going and the signs were ominous when Lubo Lapsansky put the visitors ahead in the oppressive heat. In the 20th minute, Lapsansky let loose a 30-metre blast that beat everyone from the defence to Paul Henderson in goal.

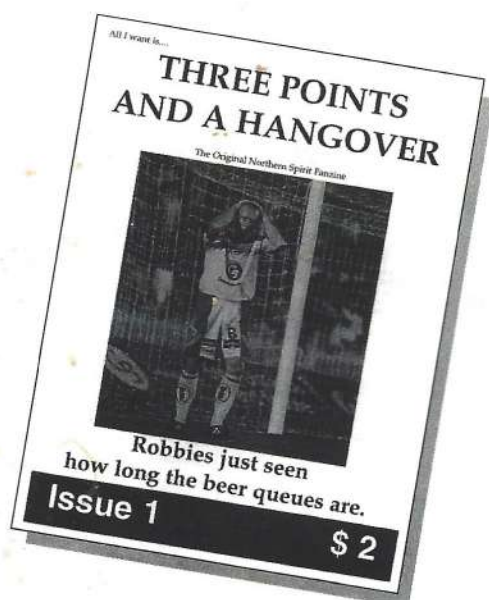
The G3 Northern Spirit were eventually to awake from their slumber and realised their sixth placing on the ladder was looking shaky. Coach Graham Arnold brought Clayton Zane off the bench and his emergence sent shivers down the spine of the Carlton side as it proved the masterstroke that turned this particular match on its ear.

His introduction into play attracted the attention of two Carlton defenders at all times, thereby creating space for others to exploit, something Spirit had threatened all season but rarely had they delivered at this time.

Arnold himself netted the equaliser in stoppage time of the first-half when Zane pulled two defenders out of position allowing the player/coach to steal in and score, the smile on his face telling its own wonderful story as he continued his run into the net and hanging on to the meshing at the rear, cheered the supporters at the McCartney Stand end of the ground. To say the wily old fox of Australian football deserved his goal would be an understatement.

Onto the 59th minute and that man Zane again took on the defence, twisting and turning them in all directions before laying the ball off to Kresimir Marusic. 'Kresh' beat three defenders before slipping a pass into the path of Robbie Slater. The Spirit captain made no mistake as the home side took the lead for the first and decisive time.

Zane continued to run his markers ragged. Once more he created time and space in the box for Marusic to add the icing on the cake with a left foot shot from the edge of the area.



FEBRUARY

1999

MILESTONE

Before the match, a skydiver hove into view with a large flag begging the question: *Donna, will you marry me? Love Paul.* The gentleman appeared at the side of the pitch, microphone in hand, and asked the question again. Much to the incredulous cries of 'NO' from the married ones amongst the crowd, Donna agreed and the marriage would take place before the Cosmos game on 19th March with Robbie Slater agreeing to give the bride away.

In another significant first, the Spirit fanzine '*All I Want Is Three Points And A Hangover*' appeared around the ground. In a bizarre quirk of fate, the front cover was exactly the same as the official matchday programme for this match although the caption beneath didn't read the same. The fanzine was very well received and a second edition was to hit the streets at the Adelaide Sharks game.

Coaches comment: *"Zane put in a wonderful performance today and it was great to see. He started on the bench but when things were not going quite as planned, I brought him on and he helped to turn the match around. He put himself about in helping to create all three goals and looks to be regaining his confidence on the ball. We have Ian Crook and Matthew Bingley, when he is fully fit to make his debut, to come into the side and things are starting to take shape for us at last. We need to perform consistently and if we do, we'll give this competition one hell of a shake. I always said that we would be better in the second half of the season and that's how it's turning out. Mattie Langdon deserved to be named as the 'Man of the Match' as he does not always get the recognition he should at times."*

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic (Watkins 80), Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Cunico, Enes (Bosnar 86), Langdon, Mendez (Zane 40).

Carlton: Anastasiadis, Atkinson, Stergiopoulos (Grbac 80), Marth, Lapsansky, Bresciano, Moriera, Tricarico (Della Rocca 80), Cervinski (Markovac 86), Anthopoulos, Thompson.

Y/C: Spirit - Rudan, Marusic
Carlton - Marth, Tricarico

R/C: Nil

Ref: Simon Micallef

Att: 8,328

Pos: 5th

The Sydney Challenge

FINAL STANDINGS



With the G3 Northern Spirit having already completed their three games in the tournament, it was to be a two week wait to see whether Sydney United could overtake them and win the inaugural 'Sydney Challenge Trophy'.

An exciting game saw Sydney Olympic emerge as the 2-1 victors on their home ground and so it was that the G3 Northern Spirit were to be crowned as the 'Champions of Sydney', a title they hoped would only be the start of the collection.

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PTS	G/D
G3 NORTHERN SPIRIT	3	2	0	1	7	4	9	+3
Sydney Olympic	3	2	0	1	9	4	7	+5
Sydney United	3	2	0	1	6	4	8	+2
Marconi Fairfield	3	0	0	3	2	12	0	-10

FULL RESULTS

- 15th Jan **G3 Northern Spirit** 4 (Bilokapic 23, Slater 28, Marusic 40, Watkins 85)
Marconi Fairfield 0
- 24th Jan Sydney Olympic 2 (Cardozo 43,87)
G3 Northern Spirit 3 (Slater 9,29, Enes 54)
- 26th Jan Sydney United 3 (Griffiths 41, Sterjovski 60,84p)
Marconi Fairfield 2 (Gibson 9,50)
- 29th Jan **G3 Northern Spirit** 1 (Marusic 68)
Sydney United 2 (Burns 44, Griffiths 83)
- 31st Jan Sydney Olympic 5 (Cervinski 12, Cardozo 65,81, Tome 76, Augerinos 82)
Marconi Fairfield 0
- 14th Feb Sydney Olympic 2 (Kalantzis 20, Cardozo 39)
Sydney United 1 (Ardone 57)

ROUND TWENTY ONE

Sunday, 21st February 1999

Melbourne Knights 2

Kelic 38

Kutlesovski 77

G3 Northern Spirit 3

Watkins 33

Arnold 46

Slater 77

A missed penalty aside, Spirit were not to be denied on the road in Melbourne.

A sluggish start saw few goal scoring opportunities present themselves to either team until the game sparked into life just after the half-an-hour mark.

Matthew Bingley threaded a pass through to Graham Arnold. His shot beat Joe Didulica in the Knights goal but cannoned back into play off the post.

However, four minutes later and Spirit did take a deserved lead.

Another Matthew, Langdon this time, set off on a run down the left flank. Beating his opposing number, he took the ball to the byeline before cutting it back into the area for Daniel Watkins to gratefully poke over the line for his third goal of the season.

With the Knights rocking, Spirit were unable to press home their advantage and the scores were locked once more with four minutes of the half remaining as the Knights replied with a vengeance.

Spirit lost the ball in midfield to Knights skipper Ante Kovacevic. His pass singled out Ivan Kelic who hit a powerful, low drive beyond the reach of Paul Henderson and into the bottom corner of the net.

Scores level at half-time, Graham Arnold must have said a few choice words during the interval as the Spirit came out for the second-half intent on recapturing the lead, aided by some uncharacteristic defensive lapses by Ivan Jolic.

His first slip cost the ultimate price when he inadvertently flicked on a Robbie Slater free-kick to Graham Arnold at the far post who gleefully headed into the unguarded net with only a minute of the second stanza having been played. Next, he committed a foul inside the area to give the visitors the chance to go further ahead from the penalty spot.

Spirit captain Robbie Slater took the place kick but his well struck effort was saved by Didulica when guessing the right way and also managing to hold on to the ball with the rest of the Spirit frontline following up.

However, the Knights could count themselves lucky the penalty was not ordered to be retaken by referee Louis Prospero as several of their players were guilty of encroachment in the area before the ball had been played.

A fine performance by the Spirit defence limited the Knights to long-range shots. Zeljko Susa was left to rue one drive that narrowly slipped past the angle of crossbar and post.

Slater thought the result was beyond doubt when Luke Casserly found him totally unmarked inside the area in the 77th minute, and he made no mistake tucking his header away with consummate ease, again at the far post as the Knights were guilty of 'ball-watching' in the area once more.

Ice Kutlesovski reduced the deficit to one when he avoided the attentions of two Spirit defenders to beat Henderson just three-minutes later, but they couldn't go on from there to get something out of this particular match.

Joe Biskic, Knights coach, said later: *"It was our best performance of the season and there were good signs as the players kept going after falling behind. Both teams played really well but I'm sorry we didn't get at least a point from this match."*

On a ground that was too hard to take a stud, this was never going to be a classic for the purists, but all agreed it was certainly entertaining enough to warrant the entry fee.

FEBRUARY 1999

MILESTONE

Matthew Bingley makes an impressive start to his Spirit career.

Coaches comment: *"We did give the ball away too easily and far too often. That must really go down in part to the state of the pitch. It was too hard to take even a rubber stud almost, but I was pleased with the way we played in patches. I said at the start of the season that we would probably need 42 points to get into the six. We have eight fixtures remaining, four of which are at home, and so we need approximately seven points, or more, from those games."*

Knights: Jo.Didulica, Jolic, Susa (Magdic 80), Kovacevic, Pondeljic, Kiratzoglou, Kutlesovski, Kelic, Banini, Nastevski, Reda. Sub not used: Trupkovic, Deak.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Watkins (Zane 60), Cunico, Enes, Langdon (Moss 79), Bingley. Sub not used: Mendez.

Y/C: Knights - Jolic, Susa, Banini
Spirit - Zane, Enes, Bingley

R/C: Nil

Ref: Louis Prospero

Att: 3,728

Pos: 4th



Roberto "Irons" Enes

ROUND TWENTY TWO

Sunday, 28th February 1999

Wollongong Wolves 3

Surjan 9,11,51

G3 Northern Spirit 2

Slater 22

Bingley 66

Two goals inside the first ten minutes saw Spirit playing catch-up football after being hit by two sucker punches at Brandon Park. Instead of looking at a spot in the top two, Spirit dropped their guard and received two uppercuts that made it difficult to come back from.

Scott Chipperfield was the stand-out player for the Wolves and most of the lead-up work came from him as he set about the task of losing his shadow, Mark Rudan, with relish and was to be a key factor in a match that thrilled, entertained and could have gone either way at the finish.

Chipperfield's cross in the 7th minute should have started the ball rolling for Wolves but for the mis-timed jump of Fiji international Esala Masi. Two minutes later and they did hit the front.

Anthony Surjan got on the scoresheet when leaping high to head past Henderson with 9-minutes gone and then added a second two minutes later with Spirit still recovering from the shock of the first. Surjan doubled Wolves lead, and his season's tally, with a stunning strike from 25-metres out that proved unstoppable.

Eleven minutes gone and Spirit were once again kicking off from the centre circle. While the home crowd attempted to make themselves heard, the visiting fans recouped and outsung their counterparts in an effort to lift the fortunes of their side.

Although Wolves were looking good on the break, as Spirit pressed forward to score, they never really threatened again in the first-half and were fortunate to go into the break with a one goal lead after Robbie Slater stopped the rot.

With just 22-minutes gone, those assembled were treated to their third goal of the game when Slater pulled Spirit back into the match. Langdon returned the ball to Marusic from a well worked short corner routine, wrong footing the entire Wolves defence. Marusic's cross into the area left Pogliacomi out of position and Slater rose majestically to head home Spirit's first.

Whatever happened during the half-time interval, Spirit didn't shake off the blues until the score hit 1-3 to the Wolves. Surjan completed his hat-trick in the 51st minute to put the result beyond doubt...or so they thought, but Spirit fought back strongly from then on.

Ian Crook had replaced Clayton Zane on the pitch and slowly Spirit clawed back the midfield possession they had been lacking. This enabled the side to push further upfield and into better and more frequent scoring positions, eventually leading to a thrilling climax.

Mark Rudan found himself in acres of space and gift wrapped a chance for Slater to add his second of the match. Les Pogliacomi spread himself well to somehow block the shot but the rebound fell to Mathew Bingley following up and his shot found the back of the net to record his first goal for the club after 66-minutes had elapsed.

George Souris was forced into clearing off the line to prevent Spirit from snatching a point in the latter stages, but it would have been hard luck on the Wolves to have drawn this one.

Paul Bilokapic quelled the enthusiasm of Masi in the second-half and contributed in getting Spirit back into the game. Sadly, it wasn't enough and the Sydneysiders had once again fallen to opposition they were expected the defeat comfortably.

Wolves coach Nick Theodorakopoulos was unreserved in his praise for Slater at the final whistle stating: *"Without sitting in his pocket, Slater should still be playing for the national side."*

"His performance tonight was outstanding and his work rate put a lot of the younger players in the shade," he added.

MARCH

1999

For the Wolves it was their sixth win of the season, for the Spirit it was a case of back to square one and getting the attitude right.

Coaches comment: *"Wollongong started the match strongly and it took us 15-minutes to get into it. By that stage we were already 0-2 down. We have played away from home twice in the last two weeks and I'm looking forward to returning to Spirit Park next Friday night and tackling Adelaide City. It will be a very big game for both sides and it's vital that we get all three points. City are a class side and it will be a test of just how good we are and how hungry the team is for success."*

Wolves: Pogliacomi, Souris, Stanton, Horsley, Brooks, Surjan, Chipperfield, Huxley (Langan 87), Masi (Karavatakis 70), Spencer, Reid (Dimoski 78).

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane (Crook 55), Enes, Langdon (Cunico 65), Bingley. Sub not used: Watkins.

V/C: Wolves - Spencer

R/C: Nil

Ref: Brett Hugo

Att: 5,679

Pos: 5th



Mattie Langdon - strutting his stuff

ROUND TWENTY THREE

Friday, 5th March 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Zane 28

Adelaide City 0

Before proceedings got under way in front of another mammoth crowd at Spirit Park, the three G3 Northern Spirit Olyroo representatives for the upcoming Youth World Cup in Nigeria were presented to the crowd Michael Cunico, Eddie Bosnar and Paul Wearne - and also the long awaited presentation of the Sydney Cup was held. Wonderful distractions for wonderful achievements from all concerned but there were other more pressing matters to be entertaining the minds of the players.

G3 Northern Spirit had suffered a devastating loss at Brandon Park the previous week and a win here was essential. Lying in fifth place on the table, Adelaide City were sitting right behind them in sixth spot. Not quite a top-of-the-table clash perhaps, but one that would carry a lot of weight when it became time to settle matters for the Top Six play-offs. The psychological advantage of winning this game couldn't be underestimated either.

The influential Kresimir Marusic and 'the Enforcer' Paul Bilokapic were ruled out of the game when both suffered minor injuries the previous night in training, the curse of Spirit Park rearing its head yet again! Spirit would have to work hard to get anything out of this match as City were used to final's football and had played in the last 10 seasons Top Six series.

After moving the ball quickly upfield in usual fashion, Paul Henderson had to save smartly from City's Damian Mori inside the first minute, from only eight metres out. It was a move that was to set the tone for a very entertaining match.

Adelaide City continued to press forward, surprising Spirit somewhat in their approach, but gradually the home side reclaimed their composure and fought their way back into things and started to dominate the midfield. Robbie Enes, Chi Chi Mendez and Ian Crook never looked back after snuffing out the play-makers in the City side and before long the visitors were reduced to playing the long ball game and hoping Mori or Carl Veart could use their pace to nick a goal on the break.

Graham Arnold, the ever reliable Mark Rudan and Matthew Bingley withstood any pressures exerted upon them with ridiculously looking ease, although more than one supporter in the stands had no fingernails left at the final whistle.

A neat one-two and cross secured the only goal of the game in the 29th minute when Luke Casserly threw the ball to Mendez from the byeline and then whipped in a cross on the return for Clayton Zane to glance home an inch perfect header. The irony of the goal is that Zane would have started the game on the bench, at best, had Marusic or Bilokapic been on the park.

Not only was the goal decisive in the match, it was scored at the 'Spirit Point' end of the ground, right in front of the home supporters and was Zane's first goal at home. Small wonder he blessed himself and thanked the heavens as the rafters were raised with glee in the Bob Stand - where 'Spirit Point' is situated.

Jason Petkovic was kept busy throughout the game in the City net as Spirit searched for a second goal and only some excellent keeping kept the score at one-nil to the Spirit as he managed to palm away shots from both Zane and Mendez.

Paul Foster made his debut for Spirit in the second-half when replacing Robbie Slater in the 72nd minute, who left the field with a damaged arm after coming off second best in a sprawling tackle.

The match was played at a fierce pace, was littered with chances and skills aplenty but the work-rate of the Spirit midfield and defence was something to behold, especially as this victory had come against a seasoned outfit.

MARCH

1999

MILESTONE

Paul Foster makes his G3 Northern Spirit debut.

Coaches comment: "With the bye coming next week, we probably need to win four of our last six matches. That would give us 45 points, although 47 may be needed to get in the Finals. Clayton (Zane) wouldn't have played tonight if it hadn't been for injuries because I was going to use Slater and Marusic up front and use their mobility against Tobin and Ivanovic. Those plans had to change when the others dropped out. In all honesty, Zane had a shocker last week against Wollongong, but he bounced back well tonight, as did the whole team. I told them all they had a job to do and I was disappointed in the effort shown against the Wolves. We allowed ourselves to be pulled out of shape and our application was even worse. This was a significant win for us tonight."

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly, Slater (Foster 72), Arnold, Zane, Enes, Langdon, Mendez, Bingley. Sub not used: Cunico, Moss

Wolves: Petkovic, Tobin, Ivanovic, Talladira, Mori, Veart, Mennillo, Hassell, Kim, Armour, Yates. Sub not used: Cartwright, Dodd, Brain.

Y/C: Nil
R/C: Nil
Ref: Eddie Lennie
Att: 15,104
Pos: 4th



Getting amongst it



Representatives - Cunico, Bosnar and Wearne

ROUND TWENTY FOUR BYE SPONSORS DAY FOOTIE CHALLENGE

Sunday, 14th March 1999

With the advent of the G3 Northern Spirit being without a match, it was time for a few laughs and some of what can loosely be described as 'determined' football displays in a sponsors tournament that would field one player from the senior side in each of the corporate teams. It gave the sponsors the opportunity to spend time with the players, and for the players to enjoy themselves by letting off steam in a fun atmosphere as opposed to the steaming cauldron of NSL football.

• G3	Kresimir Marusic	(Dark Blue/White)
• Westfield	Robbie Slater	(Red/White)
• HPM	Gabriel Mendez	(Black/Yellow)
• CSR	Clayton Zane	(White/Red)
• Tilecraft	Paul Bilokapic	(Light Blue/White)
• Snap	Ian Crook	(Yellow/Red)
• Goodyear	Graham Arnold	(Blue/Yellow)
• Candle	Paul Henderson	(Red/Blue)

Rules Of Play

- Eight major sponsor teams to take part
- Teams drawn out of hat for opening fixture
- Games to consist of 10-minute halves with one minute interval
- NO injury time to be played, with exception of Championship or Plate Final
- Any player receiving two yellow or one red card will be out of the tournament and his/her team will continue the competition with one less (or two etc.) on the field
- Unlimited substitution rule will apply but changes must be made through the referee
- In the event of a draw at any stage during the tournament, a sudden death penalty shoot-out will take place
- The referees decision is FINAL and no appeals will be entertained by the tournament organisers
- All teams should meet at the registration table 5-minutes prior to their respective match

Two championships were to be held, depending on the first result of any given team:

- Sponsors Championship - 1st Round Winners
- Sponsors Plate Final - 1st Round Losers

The draw had been made several days prior to the first match and all sponsors were notified, but sadly for the clubs major sponsor - G3 Communications - an epidemic laid most of their potential team low and they were forced to draft in the G3 Northern Spirit's Operations Manager - Melissa Down - and the Membership/Supporter Liaison Manager - Micky Brock (both of whom turned in some pretty ordinary performances).

1999

Sunday, 14th March

First Match Results

• 11.00am -	G3	0	Westfield	4
• 11.30am -	HPM	6	CSR	2
• 12.00pm -	Tilecraft	1	Snap	2
• 12.30pm -	Goodyear	2	Candle	1

Westfield, HPM, Snap and Goodyear progressed into the Championship Finals and the others went on to challenge for the Plate and after a spot of lunch, a few tinnies and a lung-buster or two, everyone was ready to attempt (sort of) the remaining fixtures.

Sponsors Plate

• 1.00pm - G3	4	CSR	6 (s/f 1)
• 2.00pm - Tilecraft	1	Candle	5 (s/f 2)
• 3.00pm - CSR	5	Candle	1 FINAL

CSR crowned as the inaugural Sponsors Plate Champions

Sponsors Championship

• 1.30pm - Westfield	2	HPM	4 (s/f 1)
• 2.30pm - Snap	1	Goodyear	0 (s/f 2)
• 3.30pm - HPM	1(3)	Snap	1 (2) FINAL

HPM were finally crowned as the 'Sponsors Champions' only after a nail-biting 3-2 sudden death penalty shoot-out competition.

The entire day was sensational and the whole idea was for the competitions to be played in an atmosphere of fun and friendly rivalry. To this extent, we must thank ALL the participants for playing their part in proceedings and within the spirit of the game.

Thanks must also go the Manly-Warringah Referees Association for supplying the officials and to the gentlemen who freely gave of their leisure time to be a part of the day and for entering into the spirit. The gentlemen to thank this time (in no particular order) are: Steve Arbon, Chris Baker, John Barnes, John Cuttle, Don Gale, Graeme Kellow, Niels Mathisen and Hans van Elden.

Well done to Gary Pearse - G3 Northern Spirit's Corporate Partnerships Manager - for his organisation of the event and for getting the teams to turn up, and to the ballboy's and girls for their tireless efforts on a swelteringly hot day.



The G3 team

ROUND TWENTY FIVE

Friday, 19th March 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Zane 22

Canberra Cosmos 2

Magnacca 29

de Jesus 72

The G3 Northern Spirit were once again expected the brush aside the attentions of the of the Ericsson Cup cellar dwellers but, with nothing to lose, Canberra Cosmos came to Spirit Park and tried something most alien to their style of play - two strikers up front in Peter Buljan and Anthony Magnacca, however, coming off the bye was to prove tricky for the Spirit.

It was a bold move that was to pay huge dividends and as they had nothing to lose and were virtually guaranteed the wooden spoon for the third year running, latest Cosmos coach Tom Sermanni, their third of this current campaign so far, decided to 'give it a go' from here on in.

Cosmos attacked from the start and looked very sharp for a team that had struggled all season and suffered many hardships, both on and off the field.

However, Spirit were to take the lead in the 22nd minute, against the run of play almost as they uncharacteristically began the match slowly and had trouble getting into their stride.

All looked to be getting back to normal when Clayton Zane continued his recent run of good fortune and powered Spirit ahead with a left foot shot that gave Vilson Knezevic no chance in the Cosmos goal.

In front of one of the smaller crowds of Spirit's season, that goal heralded the floodgates opening for the home side, or so they thought.

Spirit settled down to play football but just seven minutes after taking the lead, Canberra hit back to level the scores through Magnacca. Beating the offside trap from a square Spirit defence, Magnacca ran through to flick the ball over Henderson and then finish off the move at close range.

The momentum of the game shifted as the visitors from the nations capital showed more heart when going in for the 50/50 balls. The Spirit players didn't look comfortable as Canberra took the game to them more often and began pushing people forward at every opportunity. In fact, the Cosmos were a totally different side to the one which had played all season and, had they been more adventurous in the earlier rounds, could well have been pressing for a final's spot instead of propping up the table.

It came as no great surprise when they stole a winner in the 72nd minute.

Ivo de Jesus, a player really in form since starting in the Cosmos line-up, stole into the area and put the side from the ACT in front for the first time, a lead they were not to relinquish.

The attitude of the Spirit players came under close scrutiny. Many appeared to be just going through the motions of turning up, playing and believing the points were in the bag. Though this was a false impression, Spirit received an early wake-up call that couldn't be ignored.

The woodwork, as ever, twice saved the Cosmos from conceding an equaliser, or worse, and in the dying moments of the game, Paul Foster had a looping header cleared off the line, but the team just couldn't muster their usual gusto.

MARCH

1999

MILESTONE

Robbie Slater gives the bride away as Paul and Donna become man and wife in a ceremony celebrated on the pitch before the kick-off. The happy couple then spend the rest of the match sipping champagne in front of Spirit Point.

Coaches comment: *"We've made life difficult for ourselves yet again. I told the players that we had to score first. We did that but it was all down hill from there. They think that against the smaller teams they don't have to try too hard. They are wrong and will be in for extra training on both Saturday and Sunday after this. If we had defeated Canberra we would have claimed fourth spot on the table and been eight points clear of the seventh placed side. Now we have to face the weekly prospect of not making the final's series. Perhaps it will help us to lift for the last few games as they become increasingly more important. We do seem to have the players who can raise their game for the big matches, and they don't come much bigger than South Melbourne at Spirit Park next weekend."*

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly (Foster 82), Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Zane, Langdon, Mendez (Bilokapic 46), Bingley. Sub not used: Watkins.

Cosmos: Knezevic, Popovic, Zelic (Burt 72), Marcina, Buljan (Musitano 77), Magnacca, Roberts, Purdue, Gonzalez (Wingell 79), de Jesus, Hunter.

Y/C: Cosmos - Magnacca

R/C: Nil

Ref: Eddie Lennie

Att: 10,482

Pos: 6th



Donna and Paul get "hitched"

ROUND TWENTY SIX

Friday, 26th March 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Marusic 10

South Melbourne 0

Following on from the appalling loss to Canberra Cosmos, Spirit had to face the 97/98 Grand Final winners and current Ericsson Cup champion, South Melbourne.

Paul Henderson made two magnificent saves in the latter stages of the match to deny Souths anything from their trip to Sydney, but in reality, the visitors would have had to count themselves very lucky to have left Spirit Park with a point.

Indeed, Souths didn't have a single shot at goal in a first-half that was dominated from whistle to whistle by the locals except for a Fausto De Amicis strike that was powerful but high, wide and heading off into orbit.

Kresimir Marusic scored the only goal of a tense, drama filled encounter after 10-minutes.

Paul Bilokapic launched a long range missile towards the target that was easily covered by 'keeper Michael Petkovic. Amazingly, Petkovic made a simple error and allowed the ball to slip from his grasp and Spirit's magical midfield maestro was there to pounce and push the ball home.

Both Ian Crook and Matthew Langdon had chances to increase the lead and got forward on many occasions, such was the dominance of the side over their Victorian counterparts.

The second period saw much the same as the first and yet again Spirit could have settled the argument but for more dreadful luck in front of goal for Clayton Zane.

His delicate chip over the well beaten Petkovic was delightful to witness but, alas, grazed the crossbar and dropped the wrong side for a follow up.

George Goutzioulis and Vaughan Coveny both forced Henderson into acrobatic saves late in the match but none could find their way past him and when they did, referee Mark Shield upheld his assistant's view and ruled the strike offside.

When the final whistle arrived it was greeted more by a roar of relief by the fans who had again seen a match go down to the wire that should surely have been sewn up inside the first 45-minutes of play.

South Melbourne had come to Spirit Park and attempted to play football, something very few clubs had tried during the season.

Souths coach Angie Postecoglou commenting: *"We got what we expected in the first 15-minutes and sadly conceded a goal in that period. I've learnt that how you play in the run up to the finals is just as important as the result and if we keep playing like we did tonight, we won't have too many problems."*



Remo Nogarotto presents "Arnie" with his award for 200 NSL appearances

MARCH

1999

MILESTONE

Graham Arnold makes his 200th NSL appearance after playing overseas for more than six years.

Coaches comment: *"South Melbourne are the best team we have played all season and they don't just put people behind the ball, they actually try to play football, which is very rare for a team away from home, and especially here at Spirit Park. Matthew Langdon has been feeling a bit down lately because he missed out on going to Nigeria with the Young Socceroos squad. I've told him the only way to prove the coach (Les Scheinflug) wrong is to keep playing the way he has been, and he certainly had a great game tonight. I'm very pleased with the way in which we approached this match, especially after the poor showing we gave our fans last week. We didn't do them or ourselves any justice."*

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic (Watkins 89), Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, (Enes 60), Langdon (Moss 85), Bingley.

Souths: Petkovic, Iosifidis, De Amicis, Orlic, Panopoulos, Trimboli, Curcija (Clarkson 69), Coveny, Goutzioulis (Mustafa 88), Polak (Tsekini 69), Liparoti.

Y/C: Spirit - Crook

Souths - De Amicis

R/C: Nil

Ref: Mark Shield

Att: 16,543

Pos: 4th

IAN CROOK - EAST END TO EAST COAST

'Chippy' followed Graham Arnold to Spirit after they struck up a friendship playing together in Japan and, but for injury, the 'Crookster' showed that he has more than enough talent to play a prominent part in the future of the club for many years to come - if he isn't snapped up by a club overseas.

He said: *"I wouldn't have come to Australia if it wasn't for Arnie but I'm obviously delighted I did now. It was a challenge and an exciting prospect and after speaking with Remo Nogarotto and Manny Zammit, they re-iterated what 'Arnie' had told me and that reinforced my decision to come. It's a great way of life for my wife and kids and it has turned out for the best."*

After seriously considering retirement when receiving a knee injury in Round 2 at Perth Oval, Crook didn't sit around waiting for the mishap to heal, he got involved with the Colts team and helped to turn their season around.

The Colts had it particularly tough as they were playing sides with an extra two years experience in a 'men against boys' contest at times. Having said that, they never let their heads drop and battled gamely on to the end and will return better players for the effort.

"I did consider retirement. I was a bit down because of the injury and if it had been any more severe, I don't think I could have come back from it, not at this stage of my career. Getting involved with the Colts was something I thoroughly enjoyed doing. They are responsive and it was really tough for them. With the two-year difference in ages, it was always going to be hard for them and I enjoyed the experience. They gave it a real go and gained some of their confidence back at the end of

the term after beating Sydney United and Marconi. It's not a nice feeling being beaten every week, sometimes by big scores, but they developed as individuals and collectively by seasons end," stated Crook.

As for the future of G3 Northern Spirit, the boy from the east end of London had this to say: *"I can see Spirit getting bigger and stronger in every sense, both on and off the pitch. The support has been brilliant and words cannot explain just how good they've been this term and just how big a big part they've played. I'm sure they'll stay around and grow in numbers"*

As for the fans, they hope 'Chippy' is around for a while too.



"Chippy" Baffles another one

IAN CROOK

ROUND TWENTY SEVEN

Saturday, 4th April 1999

Gippsland Falcons 1

Hastie 61

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Arnold 43

As ever, the pundits who preached a landslide victory for Spirit in Gippsland didn't study their form guides very closely. The Falcons had picked up the majority of their points at home, taking some big scalps along the way.

Two things stood out in this match.

1. Spirit failed to convert their chances into goals, and therefore extra points, for the umpteenth time this season and,
2. the vocal support of the travelling Spirit Army was outstanding.

Three points would have been very useful in the chase for the elusive Top Six placing's but on a balmy night in Morwell, Falcons coach Stuart Munro had other ideas and, as had been seen throughout the campaign, his side lifted above themselves when playing the newly founded Sydney club on their own patch and were determined to make life very difficult.

In a ragged match, where neither side really hit their straps, many would argue that Spirit were unfortunate not to bring all the points back across the border and one would have assumed that the constant pressure they applied on the Falcons, especially in the opening 45-minutes, would have brought about the prize.

Gippsland, to their credit, proved a tough side to wear down and perhaps were unlucky on a couple of occasions not to have found the net themselves.

Robbie Slater and Graham Arnold, belying their years, led from the front and created many magical moments in the early stages. One such moment came in the 40th minute when Slater single-handedly strode through the home defence after running half the length of the pitch before passing to Luke Casserly out wide on the right. Casserly's drive was struck with power and met with equal artistry by Bodo Jevdjovic in the Falcons goal.

Just two minutes later and Spirit opened the scoring.

Catching the Falcons defence asleep, Slater again set off on a mazy run upfield and his cross this time found Graham Arnold alone at the back post to nod the ball over the line after running the entire length of the field to link up with his captain.

It was a goal that had been on the cards and should not have shocked the home fans, who seemed more bemused by the Spirit fans and their songs and general party style behaviour.

The second-half didn't promise great things and was memorable only for the equaliser from Will Hastie midway through the term when he did his impression of Robbie Slater and set off on a jinky run of his own.

It was a twisting, turning surge upfield and shot that not only beat Henderson in goal, but had the entire crowd clapping at its mastery in a sublime display of individual skill.

Sandy Robertson, newly arrived from Scotland and a good friend of the Falcons coach, should have sealed the win for Gippsland with two minutes of the match remaining. However, as Henderson is prone to make the seemingly impossible look ridiculously simple, he tipped the ball over the bar.

The resulting corner was cleared and shortly after referee Jeremy Blaney brought down the curtain on proceedings with the scores forever locked at one-all.



APRIL 1999

MILESTONE

Twelve intrepid supporters hired a mini-bus, which promptly broke down, and drove to Morwell for the match, a round-trip that took them four days to complete. In the time they spent at the game, and in the Falcons social club afterwards, they forged many football friendships and it has been said that both sets of supporters agree that they were the friendliest fans around. It never ceases to amaze just how much can be accomplished in so short a space of time when the hand of friendship is offered.

The 'Boing, Ding, Llama' travellers rate a mention in a publication such as this, and in no particular order they are: Julian Floyd, Rebecca Carey, Anthony Bross, Adrian Smith, Damen Gilliard, Antony Fitzgerald, Natalie Tosh, James Connolly, Darren Bozinoski, Fargo Fitzgerald, Anne-Marie Fitzgerald and John McCormack, bringing up the rear.

Several others made their way down too: Christian Guzman, Nick McQueen, Matt Koomen, Lydia Catalano and Alex Favara.

Coaches comment: "I was reasonably happy to come away with a point here. It's very difficult to come away from Gippsland with anything. They defend very well and it's not easy to get a victory. Nevertheless, after going into the break one-nil up and after playing so well, it is still a bit disappointing to share the points. It still amazes me that our fans are prepared to travel everywhere to watch us. We have the best supporters in the league and I would like to personally thank all those who travelled down here for the game. They are magnificent."

Falcons: Jevdjovic, Gotis, Hopkins, Osman, MacNicol (Savage 89), Bell, Perinovic, Vargas, Hastie, Bell, Robertson. Sub not used: McDonald, Puca.

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Enes (Moss 46), Langdon. Sub not used: Mendez, Foster.

Y/C: Spirit - Crook

R/C: Nil

Ref: Jeremy Blaney

Att: 1,500

Pos: 5th



Strengthening supporter relations - after the game



Monitoring the
back row: Smudger, Brossie, Christian, Jooleeann
middle row: L'il Nat, James, Fargo, Bec, Anne-Marie, Damon, Darren, Johnnie-Mac, Inta Lopes
front: Dad Willie, Mum Willie, Bubba Willie, Arthur Willie

ROUND TWENTY EIGHT

Friday, 9th April 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 2

Crook 1

Casserly 34

Adelaide Sharks 1

Artone 27

Through the trials and tribulations of an up and down season, G3 Northern Spirit would be left needing just one point from their last two games after this match to be assured of a Top Six finish, and final's football, in their first season which was, after all, the main aim before a ball had been kicked.

It also marked the last home game of the regular season at Spirit Park and no matter what the outcome, over 15,000 supporters turned up to urge the Spirit on and to party hard.

It was the first match at which 'Spirit Point' were allowed to sing the National Anthem. From the Directors and players to the supporters in other parts of the ground, all agreed it was a magnificent rendition and was very well received.

Graham Arnold stated after the game: *"That was brilliant. It gave me goosebumps and pumped up the players. Ian Crook told me that even though he is a Pom, it had got to him as well. We've got the greatest supporters in the country, there can be no question."*

Hardly did anyone have time to look around when Ian Crook fired Spirit into the lead inside the first minute. Mattie Langdon made a customary run down the left wing and slipped the ball to Robbie Slater. His low cross into the box was dummied by Clayton Zane to create the opportunity for Crook and the former England international made no mistake as he buried the ball with just 50-seconds showing on the clock.

It helped to settle the nerves of the players and fans alike, but for all the attacking play produced by Spirit, the demons of the past were lurking and chances were not producing goals.

Matthew Bingley was adjudged to have fouled Sharks' Alex Demourtzidis in the 28th minute in what turned out to be a costly error for the home side.

Corey Artone, the Adelaide Sharks playmaker, curled his shot from 20-metres out beyond the reach of Paul Henderson and somehow the visitors had levelled the match, and probably should have gone ahead a couple of minutes later.

Again it was Artone but this time his 10-metre shot hit the base of the post and was cleared by a defence that appeared to be suffering a rare attack of nerves that previously had been non-existent.

Order was restored in the 35th minute when former Marconi player Luke Casserly struck only his third ever NSL goal, tinged with an amount of luck as it was.

From his position out wide on the right wing, he cut inside and dribbled his way past two Sharks players who had stood off and afforded him too much room. He cut inside again and although his shot was hit with venom, it looked to be easily covered by the 'keeper, Nathan Wildy, until taking a deflection off Paul Pezos to leave the hapless custodian totally wrong footed.

Spirit failed to go further ahead in the opening stanza although they continued to press forward for the goal that would kill off the opposition, who had the previous week beaten their neighbours Adelaide City to allow Spirit to breathe easier in fourth spot.

Marusic and Slater worked a move to give Crook another crack at adding his second of the match in the dying seconds of the half but his shot skimmed off the horizontal.

Henderson proved too good for the Sharks in the second-half and was instrumental in foiling Alex Castro in what was the best chance of the game for the visitors. The big Spirit 'keeper tipping over the bar as the South Australian striker powered his way inside the box and let fly from 10 metres out after being supplied by Alex Duric.

APRIL 1999

The final whistle blew and Spirit had taken a giant leap towards the Final's with a 2-1 win over a re-juvenated Adelaide Sharks side.

"In between goals we played some absolutely first class football," Sharks coach Adrian Santrac said after the match. *"We also had some good patches in the second-half too."*

MILESTONE

Issue Two of the supporters fanzine 'TPAAH' hit's the streets, minus the typo's this time, and sells out within 40-minutes. A second re-print is required, which goes the same way. The cover of No.2 is adorned with a wonderful picture of 'Willie'. Excellent articles and the players love it!

Coaches comment: *"You would have to say that the pressure got to some of the players tonight. However, at the end of the day, winning the three points was the most important thing and we have done that. We now have 45 points in the bag and so should be safe for the Final's. Obviously, we will have to improve. We've been working on our midfield but it's still not right. I was a lot happier with the effort shown tonight though. I would also like to thank our fans for their magnificent support this season and to say to them that we will be doing everything possible to extend their season and to fill it with a lot more to cheer for. They are sensational. Thankyou on behalf of all the players."*

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly (Watkins 87), Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic, Zane, Langdon (Moss 72), Bingley. Sub not used: Mendez.

Sharks: Wildy, Castro, Alagich, Kuzmanovic, Artone, Milosevic, Duric, Pezos (Kokkinoplitis 80), Porter, Westervelt, Demourtzidis (Mihalopoulos 61). Sub not used: landiorio.

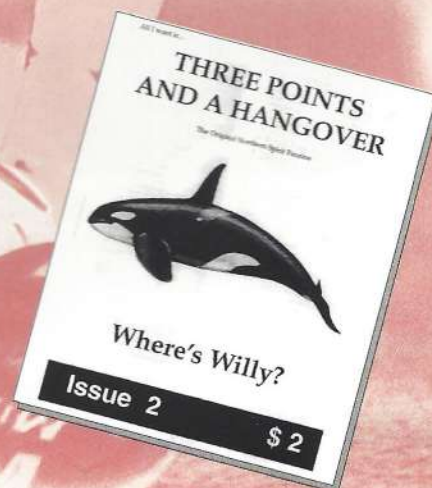
Y/C: Spirit - Crook, Marusic.
Sharks - Nil

R/C: Nil

Ref: Mark Shield

Att: 15,246

Pos: 4th



INJURY UPDATE

Robbie Enes would miss the rest of the season after going under the knife for a cartilage operation on Friday, 23rd April. Obviously, it meant he would miss the Breakers match and again makes one wonder about the training ground curse. If ever more evidence was needed to convict.....

Four Nation Teams



Scottish Team



Irish Team



England Team



Cornish Team

ROUND TWENTY NINE

Friday, 16th April 1999

Newcastle Breakers 1

Haythornthwaite 67

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Bilokapic 59p

The Breakers fans booed the G3 Spirit from the park in a display of bad sportsmanship, similar to that of the media in the following days press. To say that the visitors were 'lucky' to come away with a draw may be a fair point, but to say they were negative makes a total mockery of the sport. The fact is that the Spirit can count themselves fortunate to come away with the solitary point necessary to ensure Final's football. Of that there can be no argument. Where the reporters let themselves down is when they cannot see the pattern of play emerging before their eyes, and therefore do not report it.

Newcastle Breakers hit on the break where possible but whenever possession was lost, it was every man back into their own half to defend. They showed, for the main, little initiative and even less will to take the game to the visitors in what could be considered as a major game in the clubs history.

With 36 points to their credit, they needed 38 to amass their highest NSL tally since entering the league. With three points up for a win, they could have surpassed that total with ease. However, this was a game they were determined not to lose and with one more match to come, a point was a bonus which they may be able to capitalise on in that last game, even though they probably should have taken all three in this one.

The state of the playing surface was not conducive to fast, free flowing football. Heavy overnight rain had turned the pitch into a boggy nightmare. It was immensely difficult to see the sidelines from atop the hill and one can only imagine how hard it was for the players to distinguish where the white line was on the brown sludge where they once appeared.

Newcastle started brightly enough and could have taken the lead after 10-minutes when Brad Wiecezorek drifted through the Spirit defence and shaped to shoot before player/coach Graham Arnold managed to complete a last ditch tackle.

Striker John Buonavoglia was next to hold his head in anguish as he finally weaved his way through traffic and got inside his marker - Phil Moss - to let fly a shot that sailed past Henderson in goal. The ball struck the 'keepers left hand upright, ran across the goal line and went out for a goal kick after sliding past the right hand post! Had the home side shown more adventure in attack, possibly a second striker may have been lurking to slot the ball home.

The G3 Spirit were unlikely to go on the offensive right from the word go as they needed just one point to secure a Top Six berth in their first season, and once more the woodwork came to their rescue in the 53rd minute.

Tom Haythornthwaite's acrobatic overhead kick had Henderson beaten by its sheer audacity and as he turned to, one assumes, pick the ball out of the net, it again struck his left hand post and popped up into his arms. Certainly not the turning point of the game but something that those who witnessed it will never forget.

Lee Sterrey, the Breakers coach, then made a substitution he probably thought he never should have. Glenn Sprod came on for Andrew Roberts in the 59th minute and his first touch was awful when defending a corner. Unluckily, perhaps, the ball struck his hand and referee Matthew Breeze had no hesitation in pointing to the spot.

Paul Bilokapic tucked the penalty past a diving Bobby Catlin and the G3 Spirit were one-nil to the good. After the previous 28 rounds of mishap and mayhem for the visiting side, things were starting to go in their favour for a change, and didn't the travelling Spirit Army enjoy it.

All was not lost for the Breakers though and eight minutes later they too enjoyed some good fortune. Robert Shannon sent a cross in from the right to find the unmarked Tom Haythornthwaite. His header had enough on it to send it past Henderson and skid up and off the chest of Graham Arnold and into the net for the equaliser.

APRIL 1999

After that, the Breakers went on the defensive and rarely left their half of the field. To compound matters, having made their last substitution just moments before, Chris Tanchevski fell awkwardly in the middle of the park after a challenging tackle with Paul Bilokapic.

He was stretchered off with a suspected broken arm with 13-minutes left to play and Newcastle, down to ten men for the remainder of the match, retreated further and only crossed the halfway line on one occasion after this time.

If the Breakers fans were booing at the end of the game, perhaps it was the way in which the G3 Spirit played the ball around in the last 15-minutes of the game, or perhaps it was for the way their own team had played. If the home side are not willing to come out of their half and challenge for the ball, what more can be said on the matter after all?

Whatever the answer, G3 Spirit had accomplished that which they had set out to do - reached the Final's series in their first season, and Newcastle had recorded their biggest crowd of the season against the 'new boys' of the NSL.

The party for the travelling fans began and continued into the wee small hours.

MILESTONE

The G3 Northern Spirit secure a Top Six finish and will make the semi-final series in their first season. A wonderful achievement.

Coaches comment: *"Firstly, I would like to apologise for the way we played tonight but we came here to do a job. For once this season we didn't throw men forward from the start and we've come away with the one point we needed to secure our final's berth. The Breakers are a quality side at defending and they hit on the break well. Lee Sterrey has done a fantastic job since coming here at the start of the season. I replaced Slater on the park because he 'corked' his thigh and was running around on six yellow cards. One more caution and we would have lost him for at least one of the final's matches. We have the big game players and we're all looking forward to the semi-final series. We can go to Bossley Park next weekend in a relaxed frame of mind knowing we are not under any pressure, although we are a professional club and won't be going there as an easy touch. They will be out for a bit of revenge after the 0-4 drubbing we handed them at Spirit Park. It has to be a good thing for Australian football that we have made the semis in our first season, and Perth Glory will also be there for the first time. Once again, our travelling fans have been fantastic."*

Breakers: Catlin, Pryce, Roberts (Sprod 59), Sanderson, McManus, Wilson, Buonavoglia, Umlil (Yoon 76), Wiecezorek (Tanchevski 66), Shannon, Haythornthwaite.

Spirit: Henderson, Rudan, Arnold, Moss, Casserly, Bilokapic, Marusic (Cunico 81), Slater (Watkins 39) (Mendez 87), Zane, Langdon, Bingley.

Y/C: Spirit - Rudan

R/C: Nil

Ref: M Breeze

Att: 5,015

Pos: 4th

ROUND THIRTY

Sunday, 25th April 1999

Marconi Fairfield 1

Awaritefe 30

G3 Northern Spirit 0

The mathematics now were simple, don't lose and Spirit finish fourth and play their semi-final first-leg match away to whoever, or possibly finish fifth or sixth on the ladder and almost certainly play at Spirit Park the following Friday night.

With worries over the yellow card situation and the possibility of losing key players in the final's matches, plus giving one or two players a breather, Coach Graham Arnold left Slater, Rudan, Crook and Zane out of the side and Mattie Langdon warmed a place on the bench.

In came Antonio Faria for Langdon, Paul Foster for Zane and Daniel Watkins made the starting eleven for the rested Slater. Phil Moss deputised at the back for Mark Rudan and Michael Cunico was back from World Youth Cup duties with the young Socceroos and took his place on the pitch.

Marconi were in a mid table position with eight rounds to play and had done remarkably well to string together the results that assured them of a Top Six berth, and after the 0-4 drubbing they received at Spirit Park, were set to redress the balance and pinch the fourth spot for themselves, giving them the away tie first if they desired.

Although both had qualified for the play-offs and had nothing to realistically play for, the crowd of over 10,000 - Marconi's biggest of the season by far, witnessed a full bloodied 90 minutes of football with surprisingly few cautions as adjudged by the crowd.

One such incident came after 35-minutes when the Stallions Darren McDonald scythed down Michael Cunico with a wicked challenge that left the Spirit player nursing a badly bruised shin.

Spirit dominated possession and territory for most of the first-half, allowing Marconi only rare forays forward on the counter. As was the case all season, the north shore side just couldn't turn opportunity into goals as wayward direction and stout defending kept them goal-less.

With 13-minutes of the half remaining, the home side were to score the only goal of the game

Socceroo Kris Trajanovski floated the ball into the Spirit penalty box from the left-hand side of the area where Francis Awaritefe, taunted by the Spirit fans for most of the match, rose majestically to glance a header wide of Paul Henderson and find the back of the net off the far post.

It was a goal against the run of play in all honesty, but it left Spirit in a familiar position once more - chasing the game.

Antonio Faria made some sweeping runs down the left flank and showed skills well beyond his tender years, but he wasn't the only Spirit player guilty of wasting the final ball in.

The second-half continued in much the same vein, Spirit pressing for the equaliser and the Stallions hitting on the break, although later in the half they did exert some pressure which was dealt with by a defence that refused to be breached a second time on the night.

Chad Gibson picked up a yellow card for a nasty tackle on Spirit's Phil Moss with 20-minutes remaining, ensuring he would take no part in the Stallions first-leg semi-final match.

Paul Foster had the chance to square the match but his header was taken at full stretch by Ante Covic in the Marconi goal, and before being substituted for Gabriel Mendez, had a half-chance with a shot that whistled wide.

Graham Arnold probably had the best opportunity when the ball came to him in space inside the box but bobbled up just as it reached him. Needing to take the extra touch to bring it under control allowed the defence to recover and in the blink of an eye the space closed up and another chance went begging.

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Paul Bilokapic picked up a caution late in the game but with Marconi pulling men behind the ball in the latter stages, Spirit could find no way through despite their overwhelming possession.

As other results would dictate, Sydney Olympic lost to Adelaide City at Hindmarsh Stadium and would, therefore, take no further part this season. The reality meant that Adelaide had finished in sixth place and Spirit dropped to fifth with Marconi leap-frogging over them.

Perth Glory would be held to a 3-3 draw in Wollongong and so finish third, South Melbourne had completed their season and would finish second to Minor Premiers Sydney United if they could beat Adelaide Sharks at Edensor Park. This they did with some ease as they ran out 3-1 winners.

Spirit would play Marconi over the two-legged semi-final match, the first of which would take place at Spirit Park the following Friday night.

Coaches comments: *"We treated this game as if it were a semi-final match and although I made six changes to the team, to come away losing by the odd goal away from home isn't a bad result and I'm happy with the way we played. We had about 65% of the game but didn't turn it into goals. Of course, we'll try to get a better result next week. Considering the animosity that exists between the boardrooms, it's probably destiny that we will end up meeting each other again after the other re-sults tonight."*

Stallions: Covic, Gibson, M.Babic, Kim, McDonald (Zoric 68), Care, Farrah, Awaritefe, Renaud, Trajanovski (Z.Babic 37), Hooker. Sub not used: Phillips

Spirit: Henderson, Casserly, Marusic, Arnold, Moss, Foster (Bosnar 62), Watkins, Bilokapic, Cunico (Mendez 82), Faria, Bingley. Sub not used: Langdon

Y/C: Stallions - Gibson
Spirit - Bilokapic

R/C: Nil

Ref: Gerry Connolly

Att: 10,117

Pos: 5th



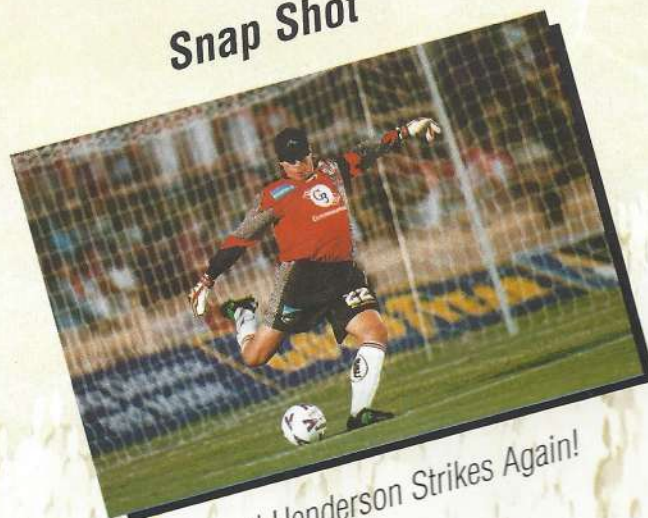
Happy Supporters - before the game

FINAL STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
Sydney United	28	18	4	6	53	33	58
South Melbourne	28	17	6	5	50	26	57
Perth Glory	28	18	5	7	62	37	53
Marconi Fairfield	28	15	3	10	53	47	48
Northern Spirit	28	14	4	10	36	35	46
Adelaide City	28	13	6	9	39	26	45

Sydney Olympic	28	12	7	9	48	36	43
Newcastle Breakers	28	11	7	10	29	33	40
Brisbane Strikers	28	11	6	11	41	47	39
Wollongong City	28	8	8	12	45	52	32
Carlton	28	9	4	15	47	47	31
Melbourne Knights	28	8	5	15	32	43	29
Adelaide Sharks	28	7	6	15	36	46	27
Gippsland Falcons	28	5	10	13	17	44	25
Canberra Cosmos	28	4	3	21	21	56	15

Snap Shot



Paul Henderson Strikes Again!

EMMANUEL ZAMMIT (VICE CHAIRMAN)

- HAPPY, NOT SMUG

'Manny' Zammit is no stranger to involvement in a football club and wanted to attempt, along with Remo Nogarotto, to attract a broader spectrum of support at a previous club. It didn't eventuate, being shouted down: *"When I was at Sydney United, as their CEO, I tried to put them where Northern Spirit are now, with Remo, and to be honest, it was a lost cause there and that gave us the idea to go and set it up ourselves. David Hill gave us the opportunity to put our plans into practice and by giving us the approval to go ahead."*

After formulating their ideas of creating a football team that all walks of life could follow, there wasn't a great deal of time to implement the plan and as 'Manny' explains: *"It took us a good six months to think things through. We did a lot of market analysis, a lot of research and we looked at what has worked in Australia and what hasn't. We eventually really put together something we believed football in this country needed and the outcome is that the fans have backed it."*

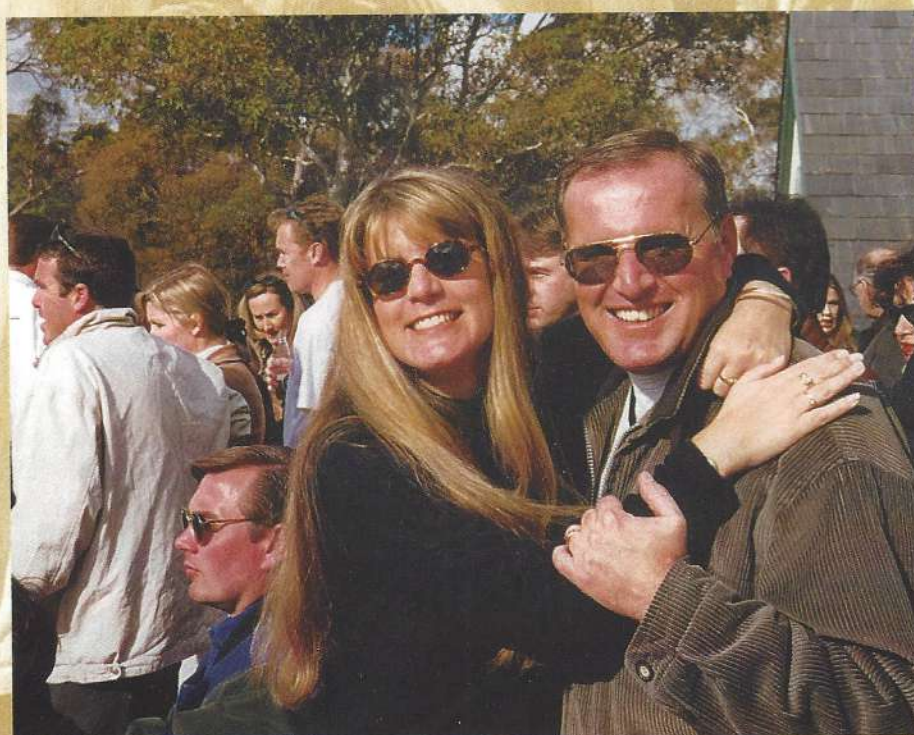
With so much achieved in so short a space of time, there must have been times when they thought they were banging their heads collectively against the proverbial brick wall. They didn't flinch from the task and carried it on to where we are today, but as Manny continues: *"To this point in time, it's been the hardest 18 months of my life without a doubt. To set up a club from scratch was beyond the expectations of Remo and myself. It was far harder than we expected. We projected that we needed a hard core fan base of 5,000 people at our home games to keep the club afloat and to give us something to build from. The fact that we finished the season with an aggregate crowd of over 14,500 completely blew us all away. It has been the only self achieved joy that we've really had. To see the Australian public come along and support a vision and a dream in this way has been mind blowing."*

That support base has come from every facet of Australian culture, all races, all colours, all religions and everyone made to feel welcome. It is something that 'Manny' feels strongly about: *"It goes to show that the game is strong here, far stronger than we expected."*

In a season of mixed emotions, there is surely one point that sticks in the mind of this enterprising Vice Chairman: *"After our crowd support and getting into the Top Six in our first season, when two thirds of the established clubs have never made it that far, I would have to say the one abiding memory that keeps coming to mind is when our team walked out for the first time. I feel that that is when the club was really born. I think that when the people who packed Spirit Park that evening saw the team walking out for the first time, I honestly believe the club was actually born then."*

That came as a surprise to one pundit, mentioned in the opening lines of this book, because this club had no fans, no tradition and he couldn't see where the support would come from. So what went through the mind of the VC at the completion of the campaign: *"Every code has its critics and we just proved ours wrong,"* came the reply with a wry smile: *"That's really all that needs to be said."*

Never a truer word spoken!



EMMANUEL ZAMMIT

FINAL'S WEEK ONE

Friday, 30th April 1999

G3 Northern Spirit 0

Marconi Fairfield 0

In an eagerly anticipated meeting, the G3 Northern Spirit and Marconi Fairfield produced a bruising encounter in a physical, but fair, match at Spirit Park, and although the game remained goal-less, it certainly entertained and epitomised everything that is Final's football - passion, drama, commitment and thrills. It was to be their second match against each other in less than seven days and would set the tone for their third encounter nine days later.

Spirit went for the jugular right from the start in their customary fashion and could have been a goal to the good before Marconi announced they were in the mood for a scrap. The ball fell invitingly for Brendan Renaud to strike from 18-metres out. His venomous shot hit the crossbar with such ferocity that it didn't land until reaching the crowd some thirty metres behind the net.

It was to be Marconi's only worthwhile effort of the half and although Francis Awaritefe proved his usual handful, even he was shackled for much of the match.

Daniel Watkins and Robbie Slater started up front for Spirit with Clayton Zane warming the bench, although he did replace Watkins after 55-minutes. As was the case with Spirit's season thus far, chance after chance was produced but nothing came of it.

A somewhat unseemly scuffle broke out after Stallions defender Darren McDonald appeared to be caught late by the tackle of Spirit's Ian Crook. Referee Eugene Brazzale only saw fit to award a yellow card to Crook and a free kick to the visitors, much to the indignation of the visiting fans. Perhaps it was poetic justice for the foul McDonald had produced on Michael Cunico the previous week?

Kresimir Marusic had the best chance of the opening period for the Spirit side when he unleashed an effort from the edge of the area late on, only to see Marconi 'keeper Ante Covic push the ball around the post for a corner.

Marconi went on to lose Korean international Pan-Keun Kim before half-time with a leg injury. The game had been physical, but fair throughout and would have been end-to-end football with little stop-page time had fate not conspired otherwise.

Marconi players Robbie Hooker, Dominic Longo, Darren McDonald and Christian Care all had to leave the field at some stage to receive treatment for cuts, Longo probably receiving the worst of it.

He left the field for treatment and returned with his head swathed in bandages before exiting the field of play once more to get attention to a shoulder injury that appeared to be dislocated, only to return again as the visitors had already used their full complement of substitutes. He said after the match: *"It wasn't a dirty game. There was no malice, just hard, tough final's football. I really enjoyed it."*

In a relentless, uncompromising battle, Marconi left Spirit Park with a nil-all draw which had the media installing them as favourites to win the tie in the 2nd leg at Bossley Park the following week.

With Spirit needing only to secure a score draw (away goals rule applying) or better to advance, Marconi would have to defeat them to go through. A nil all draw again would see 30-minutes of 'Golden Goal' extra-time and, if that proved unable to separate these two closely matched sides, a penalty shoot-out would decide who would advance to the next round.

With Marconi Stadium likely to be filled to the rafters for only the second time this season, and with more than half of that crowd there to support the Spirit, the return leg would be sure to provide more of the same fireworks in a new found rivalry that was shaping up to become one of the greatest in the years to come.

With Adelaide City being held to a draw at home to Perth Glory two days later, no-one could predict who would be playing who on the third weekend of the final's, only knowing that this was a season that promised shocks, headaches and the probability of going down to the wire.

APRIL 1999

Milestone

Matthew Bingley, former Marconi Stallion, celebrated his 150th game in the NSL.

Coaches comment: *"I'm not too disappointed with the result and I'm pleased with the commitment the guys showed tonight. We are still very much in this tie. We now go to Marconi next week knowing that if we score, they have to put two on the board to go through. Anything other than an out-right win for them, or a score-less draw, during the ninety minutes will see us through. I'm happy the media have installed us in the 'underdog' category for this one."*

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Watkins (Zane 55), Bilokapic, Langdon (Faria 75), Bingley. Sub not used: Blazincic, Moss, Cunico

Stallions: Covic, M.Babic (Phillips 49), Longo, Kim (C.Care 36), McDonald, Z.Babic (Bruni 85), Smith, Farrah, Awaritefe, Renaud, Hooker. Sub not used: Hughes, Invincible.

Y/C: Spirits - Crook
Stallions - Kim, Smith

R/C: Nil

Ref: Eugene Brazzale

Att: 17,246



FINAL'S WEEK TWO

Sunday, 9th May 1999

Marconi Fairfield 2

Smith 45

Z.Babic 47

G3 Northern Spirit 1

Arnold 81

If the match at Spirit Park had been dubbed one of the most brutal in NSL history by the press, the return leg at Bossley Park had them purring about being one of the most dramatic, thrill enthused games seen in Australia in over 20-years of league football.

Before the battle began, the Spirit fans, once again around 60% of the crowd, created many laughs when the Doughnut stall caught alight near to where they were standing. Up went the chants of 'nothing to do with us' and 'turn your sprinklers on' in reference to the match at Bossley Park when Marconi hosted Adelaide City in the penultimate round of the season when the ground sprinklers suddenly burst into life with about 15-minutes of the game having been played. (What made it worse for the home team was that the match was being beamed live all around Australia at the time).

Had Marconi not made it a 'dry' game, the Spirit fans would no doubt have helped out by throwing some beer on the offending apparatus.

Back to football matters and Spirit coach Graham Arnold sprung an immediate surprise by playing Matthew Bingley up front in a striking role which so nearly brought its own reward in the sixth minute.

Robbie Slater, already dominating his marker in Brendan Renaud on his favoured right-hand side of the field, whipped in a perfect cross which Bingley, rising at the far post, met with his head only to see it pass over Ante Covic in goal and rebound back into play off the crossbar. It was the first of many moves that should have seen Spirit home and dry although from the eventual clearance, Zeljko Babic received the ball in the Spirit half and weaved his way past two defenders, rounded 'keeper Henderson and fired into an open goal for what surely would be the opening strike of the match.

Somehow, Arnold managed to scramble back to the line and clear Babic's feeble effort away. Babic was to atone for this miss later in the game, rather fortuitously so.

Spirit again applied the pressure throughout with Bilokapic, Rudan and Zane all narrowly missing before Marusic sent a 30-metre effort whistling over after 28-minutes.

It was the mercurial Marusic who was foiled again four minutes later when Darren McDonald got a crucial foot in inside the box as the Spirit midfielder had to wait for the ball to drop after an awkward bounce.

The move of the first-half deserved better. Arnold found Mattie Langdon free on the left, who in turn played through for Marusic whose ball back to Arnold was matched only by the sheer pace of the player/coaches shot which Covic did well to hang on to.

Henderson was called into action, at last, a minute later when Marconi hit on the break and had a three-on-two opportunity with Zeljko Babic using his pace to break through once more. Awaritefe was to his right but he played an inside ball to Mike Smith on his left which the Spirit 'keeper did well to block and put out for a corner.

Ian Crook unleashed a 30-metre swirling, curling effort in the 39th minute that had Covic dancing around the area but eventually covered. If nothing else, it certainly warmed his hands.

Crook was involved again moments later when Bingley headed down a Marusic cross, only to see the former England player volley over the bar.

More pressure as another Marusic cross was headed down again, this time by Paul Bilokapic, for Bingley, lying on the ground inside the six-yard area after an off the ball incident. He managed to get a shot in that went across the face of goal, totally wrong footing Covic and leaving several defenders looking on, before going agonisingly inches wide of the right-hand upright and out.

MAY 1999

Bingley was involved again seconds later when Marconi defender Buddy Farrah, leading a charmed life all night, attempted a header back to the 'keeper that fell well short of the mark and the makeshift Spirit striker was in like a flash. Covic, awake to the situation, sprinted from his line and did enough to put Bingley off before all three players ended up in a heap.

In the 52nd minute of the first-half, though quite where seven minutes of stoppage time could have been produced from is anyone's guess, Gibson took a corner for the Stallions which was met by a glancing header from Smith to put the home side one-nil in front at the break, much to the frustration of the travelling Spirit hordes.

With the second period just minutes old, and Arnold reverting to his old striking role for Spirit, a hopeful 60-metre punt by Robbie Hooker saw Henderson sprinting off his line to collect. Sadly for the Spirit custodian, he realised late that the ball would fall outside the area and as he allowed it to drop, it took a wicked bounce off the pitch, over his head and although valiantly attempting to retrieve the situation, Zeljko Babic was able to canter past him and pop the ball into the unguarded net for the easiest goal he'll ever score.

Henderson, having not made an error since the round two match in Perth almost, was distraught but it wasn't too long ago that Covic was beaten at the same end in a game when the ball bounced over his head when he stood on the goal-line.

Spirit, having had trouble finding the net all season, were now faced with having to score twice in the final 41-minutes of this game if they were to proceed on to meet Perth Glory at the WACA the following Saturday night.

They produced a catalogue of chances that would only reduce the deficit once.

49th - Reminiscent of an earlier move, Arnold played the ball to Langdon, who in turn laid it on to Marusic. Back it went to Arnold who sent two defenders the wrong way and slipped past a third before firing inches wide,

54th - Robbie Slater launches one from the right-hand corner of the area that Covic has trouble holding,

62nd - Clayton Zane fires from inside the six-yard box which Buddy Farrah keeps out with his hands on the line. No penalty is given, Farrah doesn't receive a red card and play goes on. A strange decision considering that a referee and assistant referee should both be unsighted at the same time and that neither of them saw the incident,

Finals

Continued

75th - Paul Bilokapic fires in a cross that Arnold, despite his well documented neck injury, heads wide,

78th - Substitute Paul Foster, having replaced Bilokapic moments earlier, manages to toe-poke the ball towards goal but Covic saves comfortably,

80th - Marusic sends one in that Covic drops. Sadly Paul Foster just isn't quite quick enough to reach the ball first,

81st - Tony Faria, replacement for Langdon, stands Hooker up, ghosts past two defenders and whips in a cross that again Covic cannot handle, but this time Arnold is there to pick up the crumbs and bring the score back to 2-1 in Marconi's favour and with nine minutes remaining, it's all hands to the pump,

88th - Marusic fires in a shot from the edge of the box that skims the bar, but the goal would have been disallowed had it gone in for a 'pushing' foul that was certainly no worse than anything Marconi had been producing all evening.

The above details only the better chances for Spirit when, in reality, there were many more half-chances that on any other given day would probably have nestled nicely in the back of the net, but Marconi also had opportunities to seal their victory as the visitors played the game further upfield in the chase for the elusive goals, only for some woeful finishing to be the end product which surely had the Stallions coach Frank Farina reaching for the heart pills from his position on the bench.

The match produced a real cup final atmosphere and, as such, there could only be one winner, sadly it wasn't to be the G3 Northern Spirit but, in time honoured fashion, it will give the side time to recoup, heal and concentrate for another assault on the Ericsson Cup in season 1999/2000.

Coaches comment: *"Paul Henderson has had a wonderful season for the Spirit and I feel for him right now. I am certainly not going to criticise him because he has helped to gain us many points this year and without him we wouldn't have reached the final's in the first place. I did throw my boots to the supporters and at the moment I'm hurting, but I still have the desire to play on next season, then again, maybe I'll concentrate on the coaching side. I'll see how I pull up after pre-season training and besides, it's a superstition thing. I didn't want to keep a hold of unlucky boots. With regards the penalty incident, it was a red card offence and a certain penalty. Had it been given, it would have changed the whole complexion of the game. It wasn't and it's water under the bridge now. Good luck to Marconi and all the other sides left in the final's and the heartfelt thanks of the players to all of our supporters. They have been magnificent this term and we'll be out to do better for them next season."*

Stallions: Covic, Gibson, M.Babic, Longo, McDonald (Phillips 78), Z.Babic (Trajanovski 77), Smith, Farrah, Awaritefe, Renaud, Hooker. Sub not used: Hughes, Invincible, Farina

Spirit: Henderson, Crook, Rudan, Casserly, Marusic, Slater, Arnold, Bilokapic (Foster 73), Zane, Langdon (Faria 79), Bingley. Sub not used: Perosh, Moss, Cunico

Y/C: Stallions - Smith
Spirit - Arnold

R/C: Nil

Ref: Mark Shield

Att: 11,319

Agg: Marconi win 2-1 and progress to meet Perth Glory at the WACA.

HIS MASTERS VOICE

THE SEASON IN CONTEXT

HIS MASTERS VOICE (PT 3) - THE SEASON IN CONTEXT

With the season now at its conclusion, Graham Arnold could afford himself the small luxury of looking back on what must be deemed a successful year: *"Maybe people underestimated the job at hand. Because we had good name players it doesn't automatically make for a good football side. What we achieved in our first year, both on and off the field, was outstanding. I was proud of our on-field results. To make the six in our first year, when you consider Perth Glory took three years to make it, was a wonderful achievement and things look promising for our future. We are not here for the short term, we're here for the long haul and we definitely now have something to build on."*

In addition, there were moments during the campaign that were cause for delight: *"The most pleasing aspect of the season was definitely the young guys who came through. I do believe in youth and the supporters will see more youngsters who have as much skill and talent as this year's crop coming into the side next season. What we must be sure of is that we don't do a Carlton because the supporters deserve to have a team who are going to be up there or thereabouts challenging for honours."*

In conclusion, 'Arnie' had this to say to the massed ranks of wonderful supporters of Northern Spirit Football Club: *"Here's wishing all the fans of Northern Spirit a happy off-season and I look forward to seeing you all next term. Thanks for all your support, you have been brilliant."*

10-NIL, WE ONLY WON 10-NIL

The G3 Northern Spirit played an end-of-season fixture against Wakehurst and ran out 10-nil winners, as the title of this section refers to, and was played in front of an estimated 2,500 crowd - putting several Ericsson Cup clubs to shame, on a night full of fun and laughter, especially for the two representative teams, everyone agreed it was a memorable spectacle and thoroughly enjoyed themselves.

A small mention must go to Darryl (Wakehurst goalkeeper). At just 16-years of age 'Dazza', as he was christened by the travelling Spirit army, couldn't be faulted for many of the goals and along with his right back (the No.2), even joined in with some of the fun, especially as not one of the attendee's made hurtful remarks nor ridiculed the local team on their home ground of Lionel Watts Oval. Considering the young 'keeper was playing against some of Australia's finest, he didn't disgrace himself nor let the team down at all.

'Dazza' was first class, well played.

Paul Bilokapic and Clayton Zane played up to the fans, the latter even utilising the advice of one supporter who was wearing a pair of glasses with lights on and stood behind the goal in the first-half shouting: *"This way Clacka, put the ball this way,"* before Zane completed a hat trick before half-time and the glasses disappeared?

For the record, the scorers were: Bilokapic, Zane, Zane, Slater, Zane, Zane, Watkins, Zane, Watkins and Andrew Zammit (Colts Team).

The evening could be summed up by the amount of children queuing for autographs, of both sides, after the match and the hospitality of the host club was fantastic.

Great little club, terrific fans.

END OF SEASON PRESENTATION NIGHT

END OF SEASON PRESENTATION NIGHT

In front of over 800 people at the Darling Harbour Convention Centre on Saturday, 5th June 1999, Northern Spirit held their first club awards night. All three representative teams - Colts, Youth and NSL side - were presented with an inaugural season plaque to commemorate their service with the fledgling club during the first year.

COLTS SQUAD 1998/99

David Anderson, Iain Church, Daniel Cunningham, Nathon Foti, Nathaniel George, Luke Gray, Paul Johnson, Pascal Julliard, Shannon King, Todd Macrae, Adam Monteleone, Murray Nelson, Ben Pogue, Michael Prentice, Matthew Roberts, Owen Rogers, Chris Sharpe, Matthew Stanley, Matthew Sutton, John Turco, Nicolas Vasili, Colin Walker, Shawn White, Andrew Zammit, Ian Crook (Coach), Sab Travato (Ast. Coach), Warren Cooke (Manager).

Coaches Award - Adam Monteleone

Most Improved Player - John Turco

YOUTH SQUAD 1998/99

John-Paul Bourke, Michael Cavallaro, Stiven Dimoski, Peter Dougheney, Antonio Faria, Adam Griffiths, Ryan Griffiths, Anthony Kanaan, Clint Mayberry, Simon Miller, Milos Milosevic, Brett Murray, Elvis Olic, Adam Snyder, Jacek Sobczyk, Gary van Egmond (Coach), Mark Channell (Manager), Gideon Cowen (Physio).

Coaches Award - Jacek Sobczyk

Most Improved Player - Ryan Griffiths



NORTHERN SPIRIT SQUAD 1998/99

MOUNT UP

John Perosh, Nicholas Purdue, Eddy Bosnar, Ian Crook, Mark Rudan, Luke Casserly, Kresimir Marusic, Robbie Slater (captain), Graham Arnold (Player/Coach), Gabriel Mendez, Troy Cranney, James Stubbs-Mills, Philip Moss, Tony Perinich, Paul Foster, Daniel Watkins, Paul Bilokapic, Paul Wearne, Clayton Zane, Peter Blazincic, Michael Cunico, Paul Henderson, Matthew Langdon, Robert Enes, Adem Poric, Matthew Bingley, Bill Collins (Physio), Steve Watson (G/K Coach), Nelson Delasio (Gear Steward).

Coaches Award - Paul Henderson

Players Player - Paul Bilokapic

THE BACK-UP TEAM

Kathryn Greiner (President), Remo Nogarotto (Chairman), Emmanuel Zammit (Vice Chairman), Allan Novis (General Manager), Kerry Chikarovski (Director), Peter Rix (Director), Rene Licata (Director), Phil Wolanski (Director), Gary Pearse (Corporate Partnerships Manager), Melissa Down (Operations Manager), Micky Brock (Membership/Supporter Liaison Officer), Philip Moss (Youth Development Officer), Dave Mason (Media Director), Danielle Kinsey (Admin Ast.).

A special award was also made to the 'Club Person of the Year' for service to the club by an individual, not necessarily a player or behind the scenes staff member, it could be a member of the public, a supporter or an association that had provided outstanding service, in various ways, throughout the past season. The award was made by Chairman Mr. Remo Nogarotto and among a host of candidates, one stood out.

Club Person Of The Year - Bill Collins

THE END *OF THE LINE*

The season didn't begin with 'Once upon a time' and certainly never finished 'And they all lived happily ever after', but the rebirth of association football in Sydney, if not Australia, had begun. Of that there can be no argument.

That the G3 Northern Spirit finished the campaign in the Top Six was a magnificent effort and provides a platform for bigger and better to come in the ensuing years - an average of some 15,000 supporters per home match indicates the future is bright, long and plentiful.

The highly respected footie pundit had had his question answered. SYDNEY had embraced the new team, not just the north shore, not just the ex-pats from the UK. They had come from the north, the east, the west, the south, from the blue mountains and the central coast. All came for one thing - football. Whether in suit or t-shirt, one common bond led them to Spirit Park - the pursuit of sport for all where everyone was equal. Neither race, religion nor colour had a part to play, just as it should be.

In July of 1999, October is still some three months away and many are itching for the new season to begin already, with new teams, greater professionalism and the opportunity to see battle commence on the field once more and old rivalries - begun during the 98/99 campaign - renewed.

It was a roller-coaster ride of a year, a season of contrast. There were ups and downs, euphoric heights to sickness in the pit of the stomach, twists, turns and tumbles but one constant was ever present - the thrill of a football season. It will soon be time to ride to roller-coaster again. Roll on summer.

For the good of the game.

Northern Spirit 98/99 Season Fixtures/Results

October		Opponent	F-A	Scorers	Home	Away
1	Fri 9	SYD OLYMPIC*	(0-2)		18,985	
2	Sun 18	perth glory	(0-2)			17,580
3	Sun 25	carlton	(2-1)	Rudan 16,94		4,209
4	Fri 30	MELB KNIGHTS	(2-1)	Marusic 26, Watkins 83	13,654	
November						
5	Fri 6	WOLLONGONG	(1-0)	Slater 52	14,818	
6	Sun 15	adelaide city	(0-2)			4,726
7	Fri/Sun	bye				
8	Fri 27	BRISBANE STR	(1-1)	Marusic 14	15,862	
December						
9	Sun 6	sydney united	(0-1)			6,236
10	Mon 14	canberra cos	(1-0)	Bilokapic 56p		1,704
11	Sun 20	sth melbourne	(0-2)			6,206
12	Sun 27	GIPPSLAND F	(1-0)	Marusic 81	10,374	
January						
13	Sun 3	adelaide sharks	(3-2)	Crook 60, Zane 83, Marusic 85		2,809
14	Fri 8	NEWCASTLE B	(0-0)		13,206	
15	Fri 15	MARCONI F	(4-0)	Bilokapic 23, Slater 28, Marusic 40, Watkins 85	17,507	
16	Sun 24	sydney olympic	(3-2)	Slater 9,29, Enes 54		9,151
17	Tue 26	PERTH GLORY	(1-0)	Cunico 73	17,722	
18	Fri 29	SYD UNITED	(1-2)	Marusic 68	17,024	
February						
19	Sat 6	brisbane strikers	(1-5)	Arnold 85		5,436
20	Sun 14	CARLTON	(3-1)	Arnold 45, Slater 58, Marusic 65	8,328	
21	Sun 21	melb knights	(3-2)	Watkins 33, Arnold 46, Slater 77		3,728
22	Sun 28	wollongong	(2-3)	Slater 22, Bingley 66		5,679
March						
23	Fri 5	ADELAIDE CITY	(1-0)	Zane 28	15,104	
24	Fri/Sun	bye				
25	Fri 19	CANBERRA	(1-2)	Zane 22	10,482	
26	Fri 26	STH MELB	(1-0)	Marusic 10	16,543	
April						
27	Sat 3	gippsland falcons	(1-1)	Arnold 43		1,500
28	Fri 9	ADELAIDE SHA	(2-1)	Crook 1, Casserly 34	15,246	
29	Fri 16	newcastle b	(1-1)	Bilokapic 59p		5,015
30	Sun 25	marconi fairfield	(0-1)			10,117
* New NSL attendance record					204,855	84,096
FINALS						
April						
31	Fri 30	MARCONI F'FLD	(0-0)		17,246	
May						
32	Sun 9	marconi fairfield	(1-2)	Arnold 81		11,319

NORTHERN SPIRIT APPEARANCES 1998/99

	1	2	3	4	5	6	B	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	B	26	27	28	29	30	31	32	Ap	Su	Gl	Nsl	N G
22 P Henderson*	x	yx	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	30			30	
3 E Bosnar	x	31	x	x	83	s		x1	66					52		y83	90	s	81	86													4	8		18	
4 I Crook	x	x1											45		yx1							55	x	x		yx	yx	yx			yx	x	10	2	2	12	2
5 M Rudan	xR		yx		x2	x		x	x	x	yx	yx	yx		x	xR			x	yx	x	x	x	x		x	x	x	yx		x	x	24		2	79	8
6 L Casserly	x	yxR		x	x	x		x	x	x	x1	x	x	x	x					x	x	x	x	x2		x	x	x2	x	x	x	x	25		1	139	3
7 K Marusic	x	x		x	x3	x		yx	x	x	x	yx	yx2	x	x	x	x2	x	x	yx2		x		x		x3	x	yx	x2	x	x	x	27		8	85	13
8 R Slater	x	yx	yx	x	x	x		yx	yx			yx	x	x	yx	x2	x	x	x	x	x	x	x1	x		x	x	x	x1		x	x	27		7	217	53
9 G Arnold	x2		yx	x1	x1	x		75	68	x	x	x	yxR		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x1	x	x	x	x	x	yx	26	2	5	206	72
11 T Cranney	x	x	yx	x																													4			202	16
17 P Bilokapic	x1	xR		x	yx	x		x	yx	yx	x	x	yx		x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		46		x	x	x	x	yx	x	x1	26	1	3	118	11
19 C Zane	x	x	x	x	x	x		x	x2	yx	yx	x	x	x3			x	87	11	40	y60	x1	x	x		x	x	x	x		55	x	22	5	3	97	20
2 N Purdue	s	x2	s																														1			12	
16 D Watkins	67	69	x	77	75	65		x2	x3	x1	67			89	x	x	x	x	x1	80	x1	s		s		89		87	39#	x	x1		12	11	3	24	3
21 M Cunico	74	x	x	x	x	x1		s	57	x	s	21	x1	x	32	x3	x	x	x	x	x	65	s						81	x2	s	s	15	6	1	21	1
25 R Enes		x3	yx	x	yx	yx2		x	yx		yx	yx	x	x	x3	yx			x	x3	yx	x	x			60	x1						19	1	1	82	1
13 P Moss		83	x2	s	x	x		69	x2	yx	x	s	86	x	79	x	x	x	x3		79		s			85	45	72	x	x	s	s	13	8		21	
18 P Wearne			88	s						85	s			yx1		66																	1	3		4	
12 J Stubbs-Mills			78		88	85				s							83	s																	4		4
26 A Snyder										82				67																			2		2		
23 M Langdon								x	x	x2	x	x2	x3	x	x2	yx1	x	x	x2	x	x2	x2	x	x		x2	x	x1	x	s	x2	x2	23			23	
29# A Poric											x	x1																					2			15	1
10 G Mendez											67	88	x2	88	72	x1	x	60	x1	s			x	x1			s	s	87#	82			6	7		83	11
28 J Sobczyk																	s	x1															1			1	
1 J Perosh*																																s				31	
20 P Blazincic*																						72	82						x1		s					121	
30 M Bingley																					yx		x	x		x		x	x	x	x	x	10		1	151	4
15 P Foster																							72	82			s			x1		73	1	3		4	
27 A Faria																														x	75	79	1	2		3	

#Adem Poric + 5Ap, 1Su, 1 Goal for Sydney Olympic
#Nick Purdue + 6Ap, 5Su for Canberra Cosmos (on loan)

* = Goalkeeper, x1 first sub OFF
Lowest figure = first sub ON

y = Yellow, R = Red
x = Starting Eleven

s = Sub Not Used
< or > = double substitution

330 65 37

MATCH RESULTS

	A.C.	A.S.	B.S.	C.C.	C	G.F.	M.F.	M.K.	N.B.	N.S.	P.G.	S.M.	S.O.	S.U.	W.C.
Adelaide City	*	5-0.	3-0.	1-0.	3-0.	0-10.	2-0.	3-0.	1-0.	2-0.	0-1.	1-1.	1-0.	3-2.	4-4.
Adelaide Sharks	1-0.	*	1-2.	1-1.	1-1.	0-0.	2-3.	1-0.	3-1.	2-3.	1-3.	1-1.	4-1.	1-2.	5-0.
Brisbane Strikers	0-1.	2-1.	*	3-1.	1-0.	2-2.	3-2.	0-0.	1-2.	5-1.	2-2.	0-1.	2-1.	2-2.	1-0.
Canberra Cosmos	0-1.	1-3.	0-1.	*	2-0.	0-0.	1-2.	0-2#	3-0.	0-1.	0-5#	1-3.	0-1.	1-4.	1-0.
Carlton	4-1.	2-2.	5-2.	3-0.	*	3-0.	1-2.	4-2.	3-0.	1-2.	1-2.	0-3.	0-0.	1-3.	4-0.
Gippsland Falcons	1-0.	1-0.	0-2.	1-1.	2-1.	*	0-0.	0-1.	0-1.	1-1.	0-3.	1-4.	1-0.	0-0.	0-3.
Marconi Fairfield	1-0.	4-0.	1-2.	2-1.	0-2.	5-1.	*	2-0.	0-1.	0-1.	3-4.	5-3.	2-1.	2-0.	3-3.
Melbourne Knights	3-1.	0-1.	3-2.	3-0.	2-1.	2-2.	1-2.	*	1-0.	2-3.	1-1.	0-1.	2-1.	0-1.	1-2.
Newcastle Breakers	1-0.	2-2.	1-0.	2-1.	1-0.	1-2.	1-2.	2-2.	*	1-1.	3-2.	0-0.	1-1.	0-1.	3-1.
NORTHERN SPIRIT	1-0.	2-1.	1-1.	1-2.	3-1.	1-0.	4-0.	2-1.	4-0.	*	1-0.	1-0.	0-2.	1-2.	1-0.
Perth Glory	1-2.	2-1.	6-0.	3-1.	3-0.	1-0.	2-2.	3-1.	0-1.	2-0.	*	2-1.	2-2.	3-1.	0-1.
Sth Melbourne	1-1.	1-0.	3-0.	1-0.	4-4.	2-1.	2-0.	3-1.	2-0.	2-0.	2-1.	*	3-1.	1-0.	3-1.
Sydney Olympic	2-1.	1-0.	2-1.	5-0.	3-2.	0-0.	5-0.	3-0.	2-1.	2-3.	3-1.	1-1.	*	2-1.	2-2.
Sydney United	1-1.	3-1.	4-3.	2-0.	2-1.	4-0.	3-2.	2-1.	1-1.	1-0.	3-4.	1-0.	4-1.	*	2-1.
Wollongong City	1-1.	2-0.	1-1.	4-2.	1-2.	6-1.	2-5.	0-0.	1-2.	3-2.	3-3.	1-0.	1-1.	0-1.	*

HOME matches across, **AWAY** matches down, **HOME** score always shown first, # Cosmos **HOME** games played in Perth/Melbourne

NSL ATTENDANCES 1998/99 SEASON

Team	Total Home	Average Home	Overall Position	Total Away	Average Away		
Adelaide City	64,522	4,608	7	76,081	5,434	Perth	14,724
Adelaide Sharks	36,861	2,632	14	86,042	6,145	Spirit	14,632
Brisbane Strikers	62,851	4,489	6	81,941	5,852	Souths	8,329
Canberra Cosmos	43,852	3,132	13	67,805	4,843	Olympic	5,269
Carlton	49,399	3,528	12	72,406	5,171	Marconi	5,239
Gippsland Falcons	30,422	2,173	15	66,652	4,760	Ad City	4,608
Marconi Fairfield	73,349	5,239	5	82,191	5,870	Syd Utd	4,522
Melbourne Knights	49,282	3,520	11	70,865	5,061	Strikers	4,489
Newcastle Breakers	54,288	3,877	9	69,740	4,981	Breakers	3,877
Northern Spirit	204,855	14,632	2	73,979	5,284	Wolves	3,561
Perth Glory	206,143	14,724	1	85,184	6,084	Carlton	3,528
South Melbourne	116,619	8,329	3	87,699	6,264	Knights	3,520
Sydney Olympic	73,768	5,269	4	85,769	6,126	Cosmos*	3,132
Sydney United	63,768	4,554	8	80,999	5,785	Sharks	2,632
Wollongong Wolves	49,855	3,561	10	75,431	5,387	Falcons	2,173

Canberra Cosmos played Perth/Knights games away from home but were their home matches for these records.

WHO'S YOUR FATHER REFEREE ?

(Or who booked who in Spirit matches in the 98/99 season)

Rd	Referee	Yellow	Red
1	Simon Micallef	Nil	Rudan
2	Eugene Brazzale	Henderson, Slater	Casserly, Bilokapic
3	Brett Hugo	Cranney, Arnold, Rudan, Slater, Enes	
4	Mark Shield		
5	Brett Hugo	Bilokapic, Enes	
6	Louis Prospero	Enes	
7	BYE		
8	Gerry Connolly	Marusic, Slater	
9	Simon Micallef	Bilokapic, Slater, Enes	
10	Greg Leverton	Zane, Bilokapic, Moss	
11	Eddie Lennie	Enes, Zane, Rudan	
12	David Dwight	Rudan, Enes, Marusic, Slater, Cunico	
13	Sam Hesic	Marusic, Arnold, Bilokapic, Rudan	Arnold
14	Greg Tippet	Wearne	
15	Eugene Brazzale	Slater, Crook	
16	Simon Micallef	Langdon, Enes, Bosnar	Rudan
17	Barry Panella	Bilokapic, Arnold	
18	Gerry Connolly	Nil	
19	Eddie Lennie	Nil	
20	Simon Micallef	Marusic, Rudan	
21	Louis Prospero	Bingley, Zane, Enes	
22	Brett Hugo	Nil	
23	Eddie Lennie	Nil	
24	BYE		
25	Eddie Lennie	Nil	
26	Mark Shield	Crook	
27	Jeremy Blaney	Crook	
28	Mark Shield	Crook, Marusic	
29	Matthew Breeze	Rudan	
30	Gerry Connolly	Bilokapic	
1st	Eugene Brazzale	Crook	
2nd	Mark Shield	Arnold	

THE G3 NORTHERN SPIRIT LEAGUE TABLE

(Yellow = 1 point, Red = 2 points)

Referee	G	Y	R	Pts	Av/Y	Av/R
Micallef	4	8	2	12	2	0.5
Brazzale	3	5	2	9	1.6	0.6
Hugo	3	7	-	7	2.3	-
Hesic	1	4	1	6	4	1
Dwight	1	5	-	5	5	-
Prospero	2	4	-	4	2	-
Shield	4	4	-	4	1	-
Leverton	1	3	-	3	3	-
Connolly	3	3	-	3	1	-
Lennie	4	3	-	3	0.75	-
Panella	1	2	-	2	2	-
Blaney	1	1	-	1	1	-
Breeze	1	1	-	1	1	-
Tippet	1	1	-	1	1	-

WHOSE A NAUGHTY BOY THEN

(Or "he got booked for Spirit")



Player	Gms	Y/C	R/C	Pts
Mark Rudan	24	6	2	10
Robbie Enes	20	8	-	8
Paul Bilokapic	27	5	1	7
Robbie Slater	26	6	-	6
Ian Crook	12	5	-	5
Kresimir Marusic	27	5	-	5
Graham Arnold	28	2	1	4
Clayton Zane	27	3	-	3
Luke Casserly	25	-	1	2
Paul Wearne	4	1	-	1
Troy Cranney	4	1	-	1
Matthew Bingley	10	1	-	1
Eddie Bosnar	12	1	-	1
Philip Moss	21	1	-	1
Matthew Langdon	23	1	-	1
Paul Henderson	30	1	-	1

(Yellow = 1 point, Red = 2 points)

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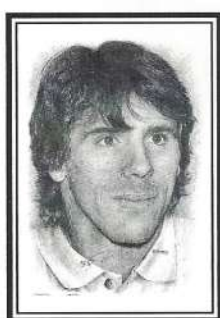
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HOME & AWAY

	P	W	D	L	F	A	W	D	L	F	A	Pts
SU	28	11	2	1	33	16	7	2	5	20	17	58
SM	28	12	2	0	30	10	5	4	5	20	15	57
PG	28	9	2	3	30	13	7	3	4	32	24	53
MF	28	9	1	4	31	18	6	2	6	22	29	48
NS	28	9	2	3	19	10	5	2	7	17	25	46
AC	28	10	3	1	29	8	3	3	8	10	18	45
SO	28	10	3	1	33	13	2	4	8	13	23	43
NB	28	6	5	3	19	15	4	2	8	10	18	40
BS	28	7	4	3	24	16	4	2	8	17	31	39
WC	28	5	5	4	27	22	3	3	8	18	30	32
C	28	7	2	5	32	19	2	2	10	15	28	31
MK	28	6	2	6	21	18	2	3	9	11	25	29
AS	28	5	4	5	24	18	2	2	10	12	28	27
GF	28	4	4	6	8	17	1	6	7	9	27	25
CC	28	3	1	10	11	23	1	2	11	10	32	15

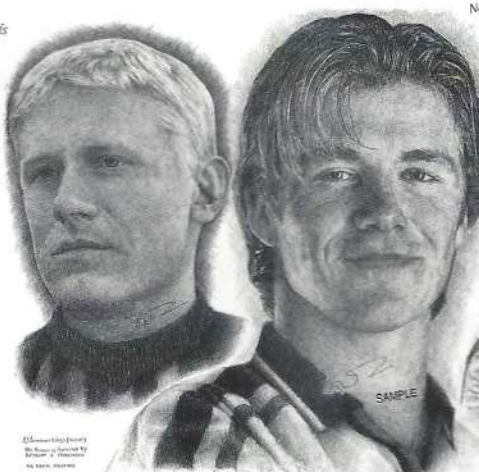
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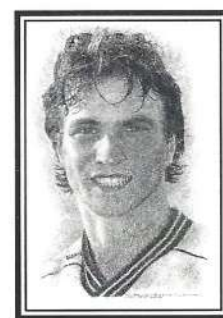
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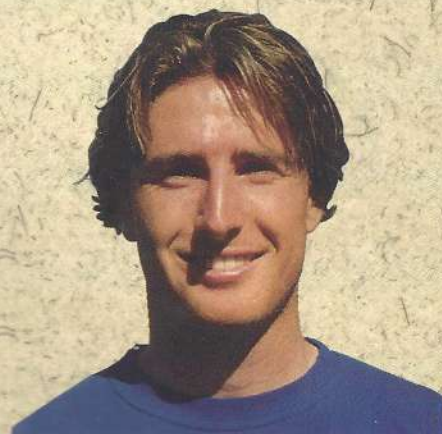
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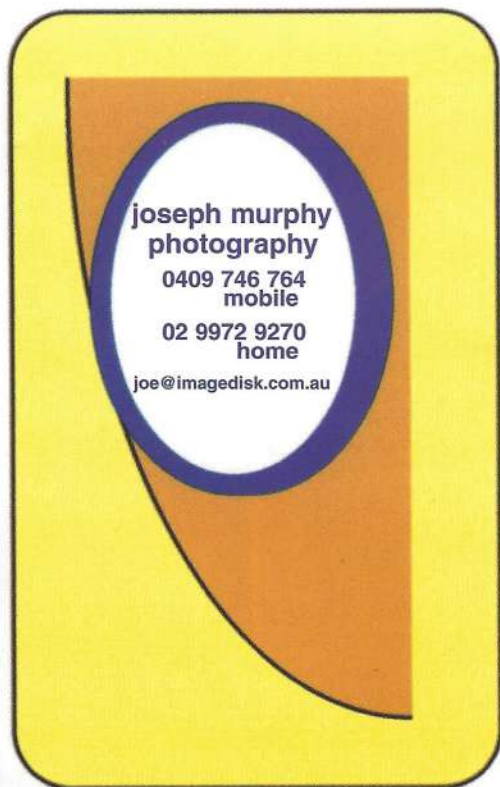
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Nicholas 'Nick' Purdue (#2)



DOB: 24/12/78 Sydney
 SIGN: Capricorn
 POS: Central Defender
 HGT: 1.80m
 WGT: 74kg
 SPIRIT APS: 1 (loaned to Canberra Cosmos)
 SPIRIT GLS: Nil
 NSL APS: 1
 NSL GLS: 15
 PREV CLUBS: Roda JC (Hol), KRC Genk (Bel), Parramatta Eagles, St George, Sutherland
 REP HON: NSW U/13/14/15, Aus Joeys Tour
 SUPERSTITIONS: My first touch of the ball has to be good
 FOOTIE HATES: Selfish and un-sportsman like players
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Never lose concentration and dedication.
 Only played the one match with Spirit before being loaned out to Canberra. Had a terrific season with them and featured in the 1-2 loss to Cosmos at Spirit Park when playing for the visitors.

Eddie 'Boza' Bosnar (#3)



DOB: 29/04/80 Sydney
 SIGN: Taurus
 POS: Centre Back/Sweeper
 HGT: 1.9m
 WGT: 84kg
 SPIRIT APS: 12
 SPIRIT GLS: Nil
 NSL APS: 18
 NSL GLS: Nil
 PREV CLUBS: Sydney United, AIS
 REP HON: NSW U/16, Australian U/17, Young Socceroo
 SUPERSTITIONS: None
 FOOTIE HATES: Greedy people
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Train hard and never give up.
 Did what he had to when called into the side. Represented Australia in the World Youth Cup held in Nigeria during the season.

PLAYER PROFILES

Ian 'Chippy' Crook (#4)



DOB: 18/01/63 London, England
 SIGN: Capricorn
 POS: Midfield/Sweeper
 HGT: 1.7m
 WGT: 72kg
 SPIRIT APS: 12
 SPIRIT GLS: 2
 NSL APS: 12
 NSL GLS: 2
 PREV CLUBS: San Frecce (Jap), Norwich City (Eng), Tottenham Hotspur (Eng)
 REP HON: England Representative
 SUPERSTITIONS: Far too many to mention
 FOOTIE HATES: Bad referees
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Enjoy the good times because there are many low points to endure

A campaign ravaged by injury but showed his years of experience overseas stood him in good stead. A free-kick specialist and a ready wit, looked very comfortable in midfield or acting as sweeper.

Mark 'Rudes' Rudan (#5)



DOB: 27/08/75 Sydney
 SIGN: Virgo
 POS: Central Defender
 HGT: 1.9m
 WGT: 86kg
 SPIRIT APS: 24
 SPIRIT GLS: 2
 NSL APS: 79
 NSL GLS: 8
 PREV CLUBS: Sydney United, AIS
 REP HON: U/20 Young Socceroo
 SUPERSTITIONS: Always put my socks on before my boots
 FOOTIE HATES: Losing
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Listen, work hard and have respect

After the initial send-off in the opening round against Olympic, came back stronger and deserved far greater acclaim for his performances that contributed to a tremendous defensive record while also adding a couple of very important goals. Will go down in history as the first player to score an NSL goal for Northern Spirit. Has gone down in history as the first player to score an NSL goal for Northern Spirit, a feat that can never be repeated. For that matter, he scored the first headed goal and the first strike with a shot for the club.

PLAYER PROFILES

Luke 'Cruncher' Casserly (#6)



DOB: 11/12/73 Sydney
 SIGN: Sagittarius
 POS: Defender/Midfield
 HGT: 1.85m
 WGT: 75kg
 SPIRIT APS: 25
 SPIRIT GLS: 1
 NSL APS: 139
 NSL GLS: 3
 PREV CLUBS: Marconi Fairfield
 REP HON: NSW & Aus Schoolboys NSW Snr, Young Socceroo, Aus U/23, Socceroo
 SUPERSTITIONS: A few private ones
 FOOTIE HATES: Losing
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Listen to your coaches and play each game as if it were your last.

Created many problems for opposing defenders from either an attacking-midfield or right wing role. Was unfortunate with weather problems when going overseas for trials but didn't let the side down upon his return.

Kresimir 'Leko' Marusic (#7)



DOB: 23/11/69 Zagreb, Croatia
 SIGN: Sagittarius
 POS: Midfield
 HGT: 1.77m
 WGT: 74.5kg
 SPIRIT APS: 27
 SPIRIT GLS: 8
 NSL APS: 85
 NSL GLS: 13
 PREV CLUBS: Carlton, Sydney United, Melbourne Knights, Croatia Zagreb, Dinamo Zagreb
 REP HON: Nil
 SUPERSTITIONS: Always wear a good luck charm during a game
 FOOTIE HATES: Selfish players
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Work hard and be patient.

Another season and another campaign that proved 'Leko' is head and shoulders above the rest in this league. Came in for some heavy treatment throughout the year but still finished top scorer with eight goals. The supporters were blessed in being able to cheer on such a gifted player as one of their own.

Robbie 'Bulldog' Slater (#8)



DOB: 22/11/64 Ormskirk, England
SIGN: Scorpio
POS: Midfield
HGT: 1.80m
WGT: 83kg
SPIRIT APS: 27 (captain)
SPIRIT GLS: 7
NSL APS: 217
NSL GLS: 53
PREV CLUBS: Wolverhampton Wanderers (Eng), Southampton (Eng), West Ham Utd (Eng), Blackburn Rovers (Eng), Lens (Fra), Anderlecht (Bel), Sydney Croatia, Blacktown City, St George, Auburn

REP HON: Aus U/19, Socceroo
SUPERSTITIONS: Too many to write
FOOTIE HATES: Injuries
WORDS OF ADVICE: Train hard
Captained Spirit through the inaugural season with aplomb, always leading by example. Netted seven times in his brief encounters as a striker, second only to Marusic, but was generally more effective in his familiar role wide on the right. Effective talker on the pitch.

Graham 'Arnie' Arnold (#9)



DOB: 03/08/63 Sydney
SIGN: Leo
POS: Striker/Stopper
HGT: 1.83m
WGT: 82kg
SPIRIT APS: 28 (player/coach)
SPIRIT GLS: 5
NSL APS: 202
NSL GLS: 72
PREV CLUBS: San Frecce (Jap), NAC Breda (Hol), FC Liege (Bel), Roda JC (Hol), Sydney Croatia, Charleroi (Bel), Sutherland

REP HON: 93 Socceroo appearances, 34 goals
SUPERSTITIONS: Always wear the same underpants
FOOTIE HATES: Inconsistent referees
WORDS OF ADVICE: Train with the ball a lot

The player/coach produced a wonderful return from a seasoned campaigner, of course. Suffered a neck injury early in the piece that was to prompt his exit from a striker to a sweepers role. The move was more than effective and long may he continue to pull on the boots in the name of the club.

PLAYER PROFILES

Gabriel 'Chi Chi' Mendez (#10)



DOB: 12/03/73 Argentina
SIGN: Pisces
POS: Attacking Midfielder
HGT: 1.68m
WGT: 69kg
SPIRIT APS: 13
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 83
NSL GLS: 11
PREV CLUBS: Parramatta Eagles, Marconi Fairfield, Admira Wacker (Austria), Notts County (Eng)

REP HON: Olyroos, Soccerroos
SUPERSTITIONS: Private
FOOTIE HATES: Bad coaches
WORDS OF ADVICE: Believe in yourself

Unable to really do himself justice when spending a large portion of the year recovering from his third knee re-construction. Produced some memorable moments for all that.

Troy 'Cranners' Cranney (#11)



DOB: 09/02/72 Brisbane
SIGN: Aquarius
POS: Midfielder
HGT: 1.72m
WGT: 78kg
SPIRIT APS: 4
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 202
NSL GLS: 16
PREV CLUBS: Brisbane Strikers, Heidelberg United, Sunshine George Cross

REP HON: QLD Youth, QLD Str, 1991 Aus Youth squad

SUPERSTITIONS: Right boot on first, left boot, right shinpad, left shinpad etc.

FOOTIE HATES: Lazy players
WORDS OF ADVICE: Practice as much as you can

Having missed only six games in as many years for the Strikers, 'Cranners' campaign came to an abrupt end after a mere four matches when suffering an Achilles tendon injury in training. Showed enough to excite the fans with his wing-play and for the 1999/2000 term.

PLAYER PROFILES

James 'Stubbsie' Stubbs-Mills (#12)



DOB: 02/12/79 Sydney
SIGN: Sagittarius
POS: Central Midfielder
HGT: 1.83m
WGT: 70kg
SPIRIT APS: 4
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 4
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Ryde City, Warringah Dolphins, Gladesville Hornsby

REP HON: NSW Schoolboys
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Players who don't give 100% effort in a game
WORDS OF ADVICE: Play the game as much as you can and enjoy yourself

Didn't get too many outings after signing as an apprentice but would be reasonably happy with the way things went. One for the future.

Philip 'Mossy' Moss (#13)



DOB: 05/10/71 London, England
SIGN: Libra
POS: Utility
HGT: 1.75m
WGT: 81kg
SPIRIT APS: 21
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 21
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Eastern Suburbs, Central Coast, Warringah Dolphins, Manly North Shore, Manly Warringah

REP HON: NSW Schoolboys 87/88/89
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Cheats and bad referees
WORDS OF ADVICE: Set a target and don't give up until you've reached it

Reliable left-sided defender who doubles as the Youth Development Officer. Without question, a success at this level and certainly never let anyone down. Has a legitimate claim to a slice of history when netting the first ever Northern Spirit competition goal when scoring for the Youth Team.

Paul 'Fozzie' Foster (#15)



DOB: 28/12/75
SIGN: Capricorn
POS: Striker
SPIRIT APS: 4
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 4
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Parramatta Eagles, South Melbourne, Happy Valley (HK), Kitchee (HK), Instant (HK), Hong Kong National Team (Guest foreign player)

Brought in on a short term contract as cover for injuries, never had the opportunities to show what he is capable of. Looked the goods though.

Daniel 'Watta' Watkins (#16)



DOB: 08/07/80 Sydney
SIGN: Cancer
POS: Striker
HGT: 1.8m
WGT: 80kg
SPIRIT APS: 23
SPIRIT GLS: 3
NSL APS: 24
NSL GLS: 3
PREV CLUBS: NSWIS, Parramatta Melita
REP HON: NSW U/14/15, Aus Joys squads, Youngest ever NSL player

SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Lazy players
WORDS OF ADVICE: Follow your heart
If they didn't know him before, after his goal against Melbourne Knights at Spirit Park, everyone found out! Needed a break mid-term but grew in confidence and awareness throughout the year. A bright prospect.

PLAYER PROFILES

Paul 'Billy/Enforcer' Bilokapic (#17)



DOB: 08/08/76 Sydney
SIGN: Leo
POS: Central Midfielder
HGT: 1.94m
WGT: 89kg
SPIRIT APS: 27
SPIRIT GLS: 3
NSL APS: 118
NSL GLS: 11
PREV CLUBS: Sydney United, Hadjuk Split (Cro)
REP HON: Cat U/17 Joys 1993, U/19 WYC 95, Olyroo & Socceroo squads
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Lazy players
WORDS OF ADVICE: Listen and work hard at what you do

The 'Enforcer' had a magnificent season whether in midfield or defence. Solid throughout and powerfully built, could easily scare many opposition players into submission. The type of player ALL fans wish they had in their side. A real character on and off the field.

Paul 'Wearnie' Wearne (#18)



DOB: 14/03/80
SIGN: Pisces
POS: Midfielder/Stopper
HGT: 1.86m
WGT: 76kg
SPIRIT APS: 4
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 4
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: NSWIS, Parramatta Eagles, Marconi Fairfield
REP HON: NSW Schoolboys, Aus U/20
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Spitting on or off the field
WORDS OF ADVICE: You're only as good as your last game, play hard but fair

Another apprentice that made four appearances through the season, more than he expected when signing for the club. Very bright future ahead forecasted. Along with Bosnar and Cunico, represented Australia in the World Youth Cup in Nigeria.

PLAYER PROFILES

Clayton 'Clacka' Zane (#19)



DOB: 12/07/77 Newcastle, Australia
SIGN: Cancer
POS: Striker
HGT: 1.93m
WGT: 89kg
SPIRIT APS: 27
SPIRIT GLS: 3
NSL APS: 97
NSL GLS: 20
PREV CLUBS: Newcastle Breakers, Adamstown Rosebuds
REP HON: NNSW U/12/13, NNSW Snr, Aus U20 & U23 Squads
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Losing
WORDS OF ADVICE: Believe in yourself

The butt of cruel and extremely vicious jibes, he showed his commitment by not allowing it to affect his play. Was never signed as the lone striker, he held the ball up well for a big man and showed his class on many occasions.

Michael 'Coons' Cunico (#21)



DOB: 17/03/79 Wollongong
SIGN: Pisces
POS: Defender/Midfielder
HGT: 1.85m
WGT: 82kg
SPIRIT APS: 21
SPIRIT GLS: 1
NSL APS: 21
NSL GLS: 1
PREV CLUBS: Marconi Fairfield, AIS
REP HON: Aus U/17 Joys, Olyroos
SUPERSTITIONS: Never shave before a game
FOOTIE HATES: Players who don't play as part of a team
WORDS OF ADVICE: Enjoy the game

Scored the winning goal against Perth Glory with a thunderous 'chip' from fully 25m out, the future is rosy all around. The third of our representatives who went to Nigeria for the World Youth Cup, his best is good now but wait until it fully matures. A hugely respected young man.

Paul 'Hendo' Henderson (#22)



DOB: 22/04/76 Liverpool, Australia
SIGN: Taurus
POS: Goalkeeper
HGT: 1.85m
WGT: 89kg
SPIRIT APS: 30
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 30
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Sutherland
REP HON: Nil
SUPERSTITIONS: You name it!
FOOTIE HATES: Losing
WORDS OF ADVICE: Don't let your fears get in the way of your dreams

What can be said about the man? The only ever-present during the season, saved Spirit more than they care to let on, and is without doubt the crowd favourite. Tremendous 'keeper, warm hearted and surely has great prospects.

Matthew 'Langers' Langdon (#23)

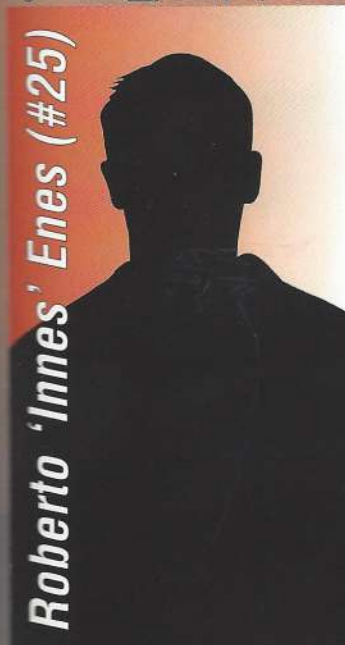


DOB: 02/05/80
SIGN: Taurus
POS: Defender
HGT: 1.68m
WGT: 69kg
SPIRIT APS: 23
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 23
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: AIS, Wollongong City
REP HON: NSW U/15, Aus U17
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Don't really have one
WORDS OF ADVICE: Just keep at it

As his words of advice state, he just 'kept at it', to the extent he proved to be the surprise of the season. Always looked comfortable on the ball, reputations don't scare him. Prepared to run at the defence all day and deliver plenty of telling crosses.

PLAYER PROFILES

Roberto 'Innes' Enes (#25)



DOB: 22/08/75 Shepparton, Victoria
SIGN: Leo
POS: Sweeper/Midfielder
HGT: 1.77m
WGT: 76kg
SPIRIT APS: 20
SPIRIT GLS: 1
NSL APS: 82
NSL GLS: 1
PREV CLUBS: Portsmouth (Eng), Sydney United, Melbourne Zebras
REP HON: Vic U/13/14/15, Aus U20, Olyroos, Soccerroos
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Deliberate attempts to injure other players
WORDS OF ADVICE: Set your goals and work towards them

Signed until Christmas, stayed until injury curtailed his season. A polished performer with additional Soccerroo and overseas experience. Could be described as a utility man being equally accomplished as sweeper, midfielder or defender. Exudes calmness and class on the ball.

Adam 'Snydes' Snyder (#26)



DOB: 16/02/80 Sydney
SIGN: Aquarius
POS: Striker
HGT: 1.76m
WGT: 69kg
SPIRIT APS: 2
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 2
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Parramatta Eagles, UTS Olympic
REP HON: NSW Schoolboy Champions, State Champions U/21
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: n/a
WORDS OF ADVICE: With work comes reward
Given a couple of opportunities due to injuries, Adam showed he has what it takes to make it at this level. Needs another season to nurture those talents.

PLAYER PROFILES

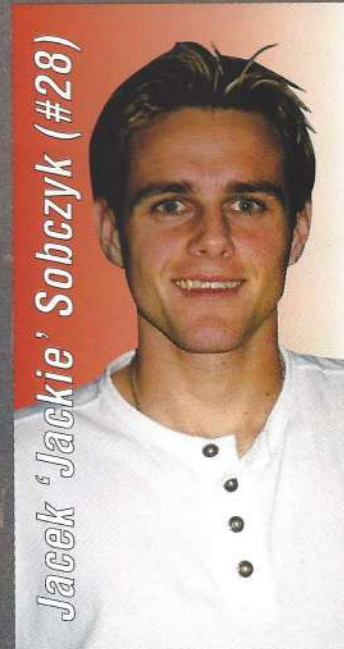
Antonio 'Tony' Faria (#27)



DOB: 21/12/79 Lisbon, Portugal
SIGN: Sagittarius
POS: Midfield
HGT: 1.80m
WGT: 64kg
SPIRIT APS: 3
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 3
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Blacktown City
REP HON: Nil
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: n/a
WORDS OF ADVICE: If you really want it you will get it if you work hard enough for it

Seized his chance and thrilled the fans with his brief appearances. So much skill bound up in such a slight frame, looks exceptionally talented for his age. One more to watch out for.

Jacek 'Jackie' Sobczyk (#28)



DOB: 02/09/79 Wroclaw, Poland
SIGN: Sagittarius
POS: Midfield
HGT: 1.82m
WGT: 74kg
SPIRIT APS: 1
SPIRIT GLS: Nil
NSL APS: 1
NSL GLS: Nil
PREV CLUBS: Blacktown City
REP HON: NSW Super League Yth winners U/14, NSW State Champions U/13/14, Minor Premiers U/14
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: n/a
WORDS OF ADVICE: Enjoy the game

Slipped in for one game, will be a name to look for down the track.

Adem 'Pora' Poric (#29)



DOB: 22/04/73 London, England
 SIGN: Taurus
 POS: Midfield
 HGT: 1.73m
 WGT: 80kg
 SPIRIT APS: 2
 SPIRIT GLS: Nil
 NSL APS: 15
 NSL GLS: 1
 PREV CLUBS: UTS Olympic, Sheffield Wednesday (Eng)
 REP HON: NSW U13/14, Aus U/19
 SUPERSTITIONS: None
 FOOTIE HATES: Incompetent referees
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Enjoy the game
 Started the season with one club and finished with the Spirit, although his campaign finished before it really got started.

PLAYER

Matthew 'Bingers' Bingley (#30)



DOB: 16/08/71 Sydney
 SIGN: Leo
 POS: Utility
 HGT: 1.83m
 WGT: 80kg
 SPIRIT APS: 10
 SPIRIT GLS: 1
 NSL APS: 151
 NSL GLS: 4
 PREV CLUBS: JEF United (Jap), Vissel Kobe (Jap), Marconi Fairfield, St George
 REP HON: NSW Schoolboys U/11/12, Aus Schoolboys, NSW Yth U13/14/15/18, Aus U/17/19, Socceroos
 SUPERSTITIONS: None
 FOOTIE HATES: Injuries
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Give your all
 No stranger to NSL football, elegant on the ball and able to link defence to attack with ease and style. Easy to see why he is a current Socceroo and highly regarded in both Australia and Japan.

PROFILES

Steve 'Wato' Watson



DOB: 21/05/56
 SIGN: Gemini
 POS: Goalkeeper Coach
 HGT: 1.80m
 WGT: 80kg
 PREV CLUBS: Sydney United 9-years
 SUPERSTITIONS: None
 FOOTIE HATES: Players not giving 100%
 WORDS OF ADVICE: Train hard and play hard

William 'Wild Bill' Collins



DOB: 28/10/53
SIGN: Scorpio
POS: Physio
HGT: 1.80m
WGT: 88kg
PREV CLUBS: Scottish Rugby Union national team, Glasgow Rangers, Socceroos
SUPERSTITIONS: None
FOOTIE HATES: Travelling with the Socceroos with Robbie Slater and Graham Arnold (tongue in cheek)
WORDS OF ADVICE: Buy the physio a beer or two

Micky 'Mere Mortal' Brock (#99)



Micky 'Mere Mortal' Brock (#99)
Employed by Northern Spirit Football Club as the dedicated Supporter Liaison Officer (the first of his kind in Australian football), and later taking on Memberships too, 'Brockie' is married to Dianne and has two children - Liam and Saraid - and is no stranger to the football world. Starting out as a freelance journalist with several publications, both in the UK and Australia, he eventually became the editor of a national football publication with their head office in Sydney. He also spent several months working with Soccer Australia during the fateful 1997 World Cup Finals bid. In addition to this, he has hosted several radio programmes on the game he loves, and is a noted statistician and researcher for radio, TV and the print media. Has an exceedingly dry, if sometimes strange, sense of humour.

TEAM SUPPORT

LAST KNOCKINGS

Many people are probably wondering about the mysterious colouring of the pages, or the use of a certain spelling and thinking as to why this has been done, or is, perhaps, simply a touch of illiteracy.

There are two very good reasons behind this:

a/ The rainbow colour scheme represents the kaleidoscope of cultural, religious and political backgrounds shared by the supporters of Northern Spirit - Long may that ever be the case please and

b/ The use of the spelling of 'Coaches' as opposed to 'Coach's' in the comment section. This stems back to the Supporters Awards Night when, under the category of 'Northern Spirit Coach of the Year Award', three nominations were put forward: Graham Arnold, Manly Coaches and Scenic Tours Coaches. As majority rules, 'Coaches' became the order of the day and any reference to it should be seen for what it is - a bit of fun!



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To be continued October 1999 – 2000



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spirit
llc.

Micky

brockie@northernspirit.com.au

Office

13-15 Ridge Street North Sydney 2060

contact@northernspirit.com.au

Phone

(02) 9460 2187

Fax

(02) 9460 2183